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Microcosm...

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Each year the Division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Community College holds a literary competition for college and area high school students. Selected college entires compete in the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and in the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The judges for the high school division of 1993 competition include the members of the *Microcosm* staff and the English faculty.The English faculty and Pam Reid assisted in the selections of the college manuscripts submitted to the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and to the Southem Literary Festival competition.

The English faculty: Sharon Alexander, Edna Earle Crews, Nancy Dykes, Evelyn Sutton, and Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of the Division of Humanities.

The English staff: Connie Burke, English lab instructor; Joyce Shorter, Senior Aide; Stephanie Bush, Melissa J. Davis, Angie Kelly and Melissa A. Shorter, Student assistants.

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*number of semesters on staff

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In celebration, after twenty volumes of *Microcosm*. . .

Since our first publication in the winter of 1973, the Division of Humanities and the *Microcosm* staff have maintained the belief that writing is to be read. We have supported this belief by encouraging our students on campus and high school students in our community college district to participate in our celebrations of writings by allowing us to publish their works.

Writing students at Copiah-Lincoln are fortunate to have four endowed writing scholarships. Established by family and friends of alumni, the scholarships encourage and enable students to continue their education and their efforts in writing. The administration, faculty, staff, and students are grateful for their funding, and on our 20th birthday the *Microcosm* Staff would like to give a special "thank you" for the scholarship support. The scholarships include:

Bateman Creative Writing Award - This scholarship for outstanding creative writing students was established by Mr. and Mrs. James A. Bateman of Hazlehurst. The Batemans' interest in poetry, in written word, and in students prompted the award. Mr. Bateman is the author of several books of poetry, including "Cotton Candy and Turnip Greens."

J. Edgar Simmons, Jr. Scholarship - This scholarship was established by Mr. and Mrs. Mayes McGehee in memory of her brother, Joseph Edgar Simmons, Jr., and his wife, Kathleen Floyd Simmons. This scholarship will be awarded to a returning sophomore student who has demonstrated a desire to excel in English or creative writing.

Hardy Perritt Award for Excellence in Writing - The family of the late Dr. Henry Hardy Perritt of Whitehouse, Texas, has established this scholarship in his memory. Perritt, author of several textbooks and manuscripts, was a retired college professor at the time of his death on June 12, 1986. The scholarship will be go each year preferably to a sophomore who has demonstrated excellence in writing and who plans to continue his/her education.

The Perritts gave funds for the Microcosm staff to purchase a computer for encouraging student writing and publication. Because of the computer purchased in 1987 *Microcosm* expanded *Bits & Pieces,* an occasional in-house publication, to an annual publication. This allows more students to have their writing read by a larger audience.

Hodges Family Scholarship - The Hodges family established a scholarship in the spring of 1991 in appreciation of their parents' role in helping establish Copiah-Lincoln Agricultural High School and their influence upon their lives. The scholarship will be awarded annually to an outstanding creative writing student on the Wesson campus.

The Staff, 1993

Homeward Bound

Joni Burda-Steinwinder

Cast of Characters:

Constance McCullough Stoic matriarch of the McCullough family, in her mid-seventies. She is totally in control of her life, quick with wit and wisdom. She is loved and respected by those around her, but her ability to point out the truth and misgivings in others, keeps everyone at a respectful distance.

Jessie Tobin Granddaughter of Constance, left home at seventeen, seeking independence, and to prove herself; but is returning home after ten years, unfulfilled in her goal with nothing to show but a newborn baby.

Lynette McCullough-Tobin Daughter of Constance, flighty and self-absorbed. Everything she does is for the sake of appearances. Obssesive-compulsive by nature and nearing her fiftieth birthday. She is more caught up in herself than ever.

Ben Cruthers The McCullough family servant, has been with the family since Constance was a little girl. He is the narrator throughout the play. The story in this play is from Ben's memory, and it's through his eyes we see the characters.

Ralph Lynette's current steady, whom she treats more like a chauffeur than a beau. He is in his mid-forties, built quite portly, and has a very jolly, lovable personality.

Setting:

The town of Riverbend, Mississippi, nestled right on the *Mississippi River, about ten miles south of Natchez. It is mid October, 1989.* All the action *takes place* in the living *room, foyer area of the house, which is a typical Southern Antebellum mansion. The front door, an ornate double door is located back stage right. The stairway* at the *back of stage left, is darkened* at the *top of the stairs and unused* until the end *of the play. The door* to the *right of the stairs leads* to the *kitchen and servant quarters of the house. A double door french window overlooks the river stage left* on *the other side of the stairs. Characters enter/exit stage* left to *other living areas of the house through a halldoor* to the left *of the french doors. When* the *curtain rises* at the *beginning of the play, the footlights will light up to reveal a scrim painted* with *the outside scene of* the *house, the trees, and the river. The footlights will go down as the backstage lights come* up to reveal the *inside of* the *house, as* if the audience *is* invited to *look inside these people's lives.*

Scene:

Downstage, near the footlights, Ben is remembering his story to the audience. *Behind him, the scrim is lit so we see outside scene. He is dressed in traveling clothes, an old overcoat, he carries a sack, which appear to be his*

belongings. Walking along slowly, he begins to recount his tale, indicating at the end the *great house* in the *background. He exits stage right as* the foot *lights go down, and the stagelights come up.*

Scene One:

Cruthers: (To the audience.) I remember that Sunday in October being a particularly chilly morning. Miss Constance started her day as she does everyday, with an early walk on the levee, down to the landing to watch the riverboats. She'd always take her binoculars to watch the people riding the ferry past her house. She always said," I think it's only fair, everyone in this town watches us so close, I'll do me a little watching back." Then, of course, she'd write it all down in that journal of hers. That journal of hers was like a bible, and Miss Constance was faithful to it from the first day I ever come to work here with my Mama when I was only seven years old. She was only sixteen an already filled a five-year book.

She took me under her wing. One day while we was in town running errands, she took me in the drugstore with her to have a soda. She told me to have a seat next to her, right up at the counter. Back then nobody like me was allowed to sit up at the counter, but she gave the man one of her looks that dared him to say anything, and he backed down. Not many people ever stood up to Miss Constance, or any of the McCulloughs, they were strong, good people. I had a crush on her that I never told anyone about, cause nobody would've understood. I kept it to myself till that day.

Miss Tobin. She didn't like me calling her by her first name. She's nothing like her mother. At least what she lets you see, past the airs she puts on, until that Sunday. That was a day of changes.

We had a big surprise that morning when we all got up, a homecoming. Oakshadows, (indicating the *house* in the *background)* was a house full of changes, each monumental in its own way. *(The footlights go down, fading the outside scene. The stagelights come up revealing the inside of Oakshadows. The room looks quiet, empty, and by the grandfather clock against the wall, we see it is eight o'clock* in the *morning.)*

Jessie: *(knocks, no answer, then uses key entering)* Hello! Cruthers ? Is anybody home ? *(puts down bags, checking on* the *contents of* the large open *carpetbag.)* S-ssush, I want you to be a surprise won't you ever be a surprise; (at the *stairs, which are* darkened at the top) Nana? Mama, I'm home.

Cruthers: *(Entering from* kitchen, he *is now dressed* in a *butler's* uniform.) Excuse me, ma'am, may I ... Miss Jessie, is that you?

Jessie: Yeah! It's me. *(giving him a hug.)*

Cruthers: *(stepping back* to take a *look at her.)* It sure don't look like no ten years passed! You look the same as the day you left!

Jessie: Thanks - I wish ! *(scanning the room)* Things look just about the same

here too.
Cruthers: *(moving to* get *her bags.)* Miss Constance keeps everything just so 'round here. (notices *the contents of her carpetbag.)* Miss Jessie ... (kneeling next *to bag)*
Jessie: Jessie.(touching *his shoulder to remind him)* Ben, just call me Jessie.
Cruthers: What do we call this... *(questioning)* ... a boy?
Jessie: Yeah! A boy. He came out kicking, it felt like with his boots on.
Cruthers: A fine little boy.
Jessie: I wanted to make it home to have him, but he had other plans.
Cruthers: I'll go up to the attic and find that bassinet we used when you was no bigger than this.
Jessie: You still have that?
Cruthers: *(as he's getting* up) Oh, Miss Constance keeps everything. Everything has memories. *(starts to exit through kitchen, turns back to ask)* May I take him with me ? Sophie's in the kitchen starting breakfast, she'd love to see him, and he sure looks hungry.
Jessie: He's not quite a week old, Ben. *(reconsidering, she reaches into her backpack, pulling* out a bottle) Here, I made this earlier in case he got hungry. Tell Sophie, no waffles, he hasn't got the equipment for them yet.
Cruthers: *(picking up the carpetbag, exiting thru kitchen)* Okay, no waffles.
Jessie: *(walking over to table by couch, picking up pictures looking at them one* at a time)- Hard to believe it's been ten years.
Lynette: *(enters stage left. She is wrapped in an electric blanket, holding the cord and a brush* in one *hand, a glass half full of orange-juice* in the *other hand. Her hair is in curlers and she is looking for* an outlet to plug *into, that's close* to a *mirror.)* Jesus it's cold in here! Cruthers must have forgot to turn the damn pilot light on the heater again. *(finds a place next* to a *wall mirror, sets her drink down and plugs herself in)* You want something done right, you got to do it yourself! *(noticing Jessie)* Well... I'll be dipped and fried... What have we done to earn the privilege of your presence?
Jessie Well ... Welcome home, Roxy Carmichael. Things haven't changed a bit. Have they, Mom ?
Lynette: (taking out a cigarette *from pack* on table *next to her glass)* Got sassy while you were gone. Is that what you learned in the big city ?
Jessie: Come on, Mama, I didn't come home to fight.
Lynette: (lighting up a cigarette) No, don't tell me... I know (pause) You got your invitation for ten-year class reunion next week and decided to grace us with your presence.(takes a *long puff and blows* it out, a la Betty *Davis)* ... My, My... The golden girl returns. What has the class valedictorian been up to ? Most likely to succeed. What a laugh...

You know... *(turns her back to Jessie, looking* in the *mirror)* ... in your absence, I have maintained the illusion. (begins *removing curlers)* Your

friends still call here wondering how you are .... When is she coming home, Mrs. Tobin? Mrs. Tobin, I was watching T.V. the other day, and I could've sworn I saw Jessie on a Mr. Clean commercial. Mrs. Tobin, I was flipping through, *The Enquirer*, and I think I saw a picture of Jessie with that guy who plays, Batman. So who are you seeing... Is it Batman, or is it, Robin Hood?

Since I hadn't heard from you and I didn't know what exact projects you've been working on, I told everyone you've been working behind the cameras. Writing. Actually writing is a more intellectually stimulating career, better suited for someone with your scholastic aptitude. Plus, *(laughing but not seeing Jessie mimicking the* next *line with her)* .... It sounds much nicer at the Ladies Auxillary Club Luncheon.

You know... *(Jessie tries unsuccessfully to interject)* ... if you would've done like you were supposed to and gone to college, you could be married to a doctor, or a lawyer, have your own home, and God willing, status in your community.

You remember that nice girl you went to school with, Loretta LeBlanc, she went to Columbia University and snagged herself a graduating intern, A DOCTOR, NOW...

Jessie: Loretta LeBlanc, went to medical school!!??

Lynette: Well, she didn't go to get a degree. She went to get a husband. She wasn't enrolled in the medical school, per se, she just made sure she was enrolled in enough of the pre-med classes to meet the right people. She met her guy, and then dropped out before her second semester freshman courses to plan their wedding. Smart girl. *(Jessie laughs louder than she wanted* to) .... You don't think so...I don't think you should have too much to say, what have you got to show.

Cruthers: *(enters thru kitchen door carrying a bassinet)* Here you go Jess... *(seeing* Lynette)..Miss Jessie, I brought him back all fed, cleaned, and changed. He's a rascal, downed that bottle like he'd never ate before. I'll put him right here by the couch and I'll start up a nice warm fire. *(going over to* the fireplace, *stage right)* ... shouldn't take too long.

Lynette: (pulls out the *last curler, drops it on the floor)* A baby .... A BABY. Jessie Anne Tobin, you brought home a baby. *(walking towards her)* Well, when do we get to meet your husband?

(fumbling with her hair, combing out the *curls, with her fingers)* Well ... What is he... A producer, a director, not another actor ?

Jessie: He's not a producer, or a director, or, for that matter my husband.

Lynette: *(Rolling her eyes, she walks over* to the *table, picks up her glass, and downs* it in *one gulp.)* You're not married ?

Jessie: Marc didn't feel like he was ready to provide for a child properly. He hadn't even got his first union casting call yet. *(beginning* to fidget) This was really the best decision we could make for all of us. *(pacing nervously* If it

would have been later on in our lives, and we were better prepared, a baby would have been welcome. I... I ... I didn't know what else to do.
Lynette: He wanted you to get get rid of the baby, or he wanted to get rid of you.. and the baby?
Jessie: Mama! (beginning *not* to *be able to hold back* the tears) He DID love me! REALLY LOVE ME .
Lynette: *(sarcastically)* You don't even know what love is ... You've been running away from things all your life. This is just another one of your stunts. *(Constance enters unnoticed thru the french doors.) (Lynette, picks up her glass, trying to savor the last drops, puts the empty glass down disgusted)* You're twenty-seven years old. When are you going to grow up ?
Constance: (with *an air of dignity, and authority walks over to Jessie, gives her* a hug.) Welcome home, dear. You have been missed terribly. We must sit down to talk, so you can fill me in on everything. (to Lynette) And You... You are fifty years old when are YOU going to grow up ? *(Picks the glass up off* the *table, which Lynette has tried to unsuccessfully intercept. Constance sniffs the glass, puts the glass back down, scowling at* Lynette.) Isn't it rather early to be starting, Lynette ? Even for you .
Lynette: (defensively) I think I'm old enough to make my own decisions... *(justifying)* .. besides I'm getting ready for Sunday brunch with the Ladies' Auxillary. This is called Mimosa, and it's quite fashionable at Sunday brunches.
Constance: Who do you think you're talking to ? That's a vodka and orange juice at not even ten o'clock in the morning, and I think you need to adjust that attitude of yours.
Lynette: THIS!.. *(holding up her glass)* .... is an attitude adjustment!
Constance: (taking the *glass from her, holding* it out *for Cruthers, who has been witnessing this)* You are still my daughter, and no one speaks to me like that, in my house, or any where else, for that matter. *(doorbell rings)*
Cruthers: (Taking *the glass)* Should I get that ma'am ?
Constance: Yes.... (quietly, to *him)* ... and lock the liquor cabinet, please.
Crutbers: (nodding *slightly)* Yes Ma'am.
Lynette: *(Upset, finishes with hair by mirror, takes off blanket which she has kept around herself through all this to reveal herself fully dressed, stockings, high heels, and jewelry.)* The way I get treated around here, you'd think I was one of the servants.
Constance: If you act as such, you'll be treated as such.
Cruthers: (to *all)* Mr. Beauvais, to see Miss Lynette.
Ralph: *(hands Cruthers his coat and hat, chuckling)* It's just plain Ralph, Ben.
Cruthers: (smiling) Excuse me, just plain Ralph, to see Miss Lynette.
Ralph: (pointing at *Cruthers)* Love that guy. What a sense of humor! *(to*

Constance) Good morning to you. Isn't it just a lovely morning. I love the air ... all crisp and fresh. Makes you feel so young.... I feel so, so young. And you, Miss Constance, look lovely as always.
Constance: Mr. Beauvais, you always brighten my day. What a refreshing soul you are.
Ralph: One day I'll have you calling me by my first name. (to *Jessie, holding out his hand)* And who is this lovely creature ?
Jessie: *(shaking his hand)* I'm Jessie.
Ralph: *(grabbing her, and giving her a* hug) Oh! I've heard all about you...
Jessie: Somehow, I don't think this could be very good.
Ralph: Oh, it's good... and even if it wasn't, I form my own opinions.
Lynette: (interrupting) Come on, Ralph, I'm ready. I don't want to be late.
Ralph: (apologizing *to Jessie)* Can't keep my lady waiting... (to *everyone, holding up Lynette's hand, like she's his prize)*... Isn't she just a vision ? We'll see you all later. Ciao. *(Cruthers sees them to the door)*
Cruthers: *(Lets them out, closes door. To Constance and Jessie.)* Is there anything I get you ?
Constance: (taking *Jessie's hand)* No, I think we'll be all right. *(Ben exits thru kitchen* door) Come on, let's sit here and visit.
Jessie: Okay, but first I want to introduce you to someone I think you'll love. *(takes her over* to the *bassinet, motioning with her finger over her mouth)* He's sleeping. Isn't he just beautiful ? *(Constance is speechless)* He's barely a week old. I wanted him to be born here, but we didn't quite make it.
Constance: - A little boy. My great-grandson. *(They both are* quiet *as he begins to stir. Jessie motions towards the couch)* What's his name ?
Jessie: (they *both sit)* I haven't named him yet.
Constance: Tell me how you've been. The last time we heard from you was after...
Jessie: (regretfully) Nana... I'm sorry about Grandad. I wanted to come home for the... funeral... but, New York is so far away and, *(embarrassed)* I just couldn't...
Constance: (interrupting) Afford it ? I would have sent you the money.
Jessie: *(getting up)* It's not just the money. *(walking to* the *table by the French door with the pictures)* I know all I had to do was ask, but.. *(picking up a picture)*.. I couldn't face you all. I mean.... I was such a failure.
Constance: *(gets up, going to her, and puts her arm on Jessie's shoulder)* Not to me you weren't.
Jessie: *(turns around, hugging her)* I've missed you
Constance: There, there ... no need to cry. You're home now . That's all that matters. (leading *her back to couch)* Ben should be bringing in my morning tea soon. Now tell me about this fellow. What did you say his name was?
Jessie: (sitting) Marc. He's a wonderful guy. You'd love him. He's warm,

sensitive, talented... he's an actor. In fact, he's working on landing a role now.... that's why he didn't come too

Constance: *(seeing through her)* Don't cover up for me . I'm not your mother.

Jessie: (letting a *few tears through)* He's a rat. The biggest mistake I ever made in my life. Marc talked me into going to see about aborting the baby, when I came home I found him in bed with a girl from our acting class. Ha! I guess he wasn't expecting me home so soon.

I stayed with friends, waiting... I guess for some kind of miracle. When I finally realized I wasn't going to get one.. I headed home.

Constance: You may not think you got your miracle ... But you did, we all did.

Jessie: (in a *more serious tone)* Nana, why does Mom treat me like that. Sometimes I feel like she hates me.

Constance: No... she loves you very much. She just doesn't quite know how to show it anymore. After your Dad left, you weren't much bigger than that little fellow..(indicates the *bassinet)*.. she got real bitter, hard. I thought time would soften her..(pause).. and it did at times, she has her moments.

I remember, every Thursday night we three would go to the drive-in, to see old Nostalgia films. *(remembering)* We'd put you in the backseat with a pillow and a blanket. (to her) You'd usually fall asleep after the cartoon short. Then we'd get our cardboard box of goodies out of the trunk. We always brought two bowls of popcorn, one buttered, one sprinkled with parmesan cheese. *(rolls her eyes)* ... Um-m-m... We had an assortment of chilled Shastas, all the good flavors, grape, orange, and cream. Lynette always made a batch of fudge the night before, so we had something sweet. *(sing-song)* Something sweet, something salty, keeps the... *(stops, forgetting)..I* can't remember the rest. *(catches herself)* Oh, and we brought a box of saltines, in case you woke up. Depending on how quiet we were able keep it up front determined if you slept through the whole movie.

Jessie: What happened when I woke up ?

Constance: Your Mother would get that big empty cardboard box out of the trunk. We'd put you in it, in the backseat, with the saltines, and a bottle of pop. *(Jessie looks startled)* Your Mom would let you go to town with those saltines crumbs and all. Your Mom always said that made it easy to clean.

Your Mom has a tendency to become a little obsessed at times, cleanliness, her looks, her clubs, and of course what everyone else in the world thinks about her. You just have to remember, Jessie, what she does..(takes *Jessie's hand, puts* it *over her heart)* ... comes from here.

Jessie: *(moves her* hand) I know, it's just a little hard to take sometimes.

Constance: I'm not saying she's right. She's not. (gets up, *crosses to fireplace)* I think that someday she'll change. I just hope it doesn't take losing someone she really loves to do it.

Jessie: *(crosses to* her) But, she's lost people before. Dad, Grandad, Me.
Constance: Your Dad--she was too young to realize love lost. You--she never felt like she lost... Just temporarily .. misplaced. *(crosses to the French doors)* Your Grandad ... *(looks out doors, far away)* ... could never really fill the shoes of her real Father, even though he abandoned us when she was just a small child. I think she may have deep down resented Frances for coming in to my life, and being the greatest love I'd ever known.
Jessie: You miss him a lot don't you ?
Constance: *(picks up a photo of him off table)* Oh, yes. I couldn't bear to sleep upstairs in our room after he passed on. I had Ben move all my things to sunroom, with the view of the river. I sleep there now, it's comfortable. I don't ever want to sleep in that big bed without being able to wake up with him beside me. I know one day... I'll wake up and he'll be there. I'll be with him then, and that will be heaven.... *(She looks back out* the *door, holding* the picture *close to her heart. She wipes a tear from her face.)*
Jessie: (changing *the subject)* I wonder where Ben is with that tea ?
Constance: *(composing herself, puts down picture)* I don't know. Let's go fetch it ourselves. *(They both start* to exit, *Jessie crosses to check baby, exits through kitchen, arm in arm. The scrim comes down and the stagelights go down as the footlights* come up.)

Scene Two:

Scene: Ben walks out in *front of the scrim to narrate this next scene. He is again dressed in his traveling clothes.*
Cruthers: *(downstage near footlights)* I remember that day Miss Constance and Miss Jessie erased those lost ten years , like they was just ten minutes. It was like they had never been apart.

Miss Jessie show'd us all that day, by how she loved and cared for that baby that she done a lot of growing, a lot of changing over the years. The both of them spent a good deal of that afternoon thinking of names for the baby, without too much success. Jessie didn't quite know what she wanted, but she knew exactly what she didn't want.

Miss Constance was the happiest I'd seen her since Mr. McCullough was here. Nothing could get her down, well almost nothing. There was something there that wasn't right. I just couldn't put my finger on it.

(Scrim Fades)

Scene: Same as scene one. The bassinet is removed to another *room as the baby sleeps. The clock reads six o'clock* in the evening, *and it's noticeably darker* in the *room as it is dusk.*
Jessie: *(Enter both women from stage left)* Nana I'm really sorry, you had your heart set on a walk down to the River landing, and I ruined it.

(Constance shrugs) ... But I'm really not ready to face any... *(ashamed)* ..old friends, yet. Can you understand?
Constance: *(dismissing* it) Don't worry . I'm really rather tired. I get a little short of breath towards the end of the day. Maybe we ought to take it easy, after all you and I just single handedly ransacked the attic to set up a nursery. *(she laughs)*

Jessie: *(pulls an ottoman up to the couch, leads Constance over making her comfortable)* Here, sit down. *(sits down next to her)* Hey I didn't come home to wear you out! *(doorbellrings)*
Constance: (to *Ben,* in the kitchen) Ben could you please get that ?
Cruthers: *(enters from kitchen)* Yes Ma'am! *(gets door)*
... Pardon me, it's Mr ... u-hh ..Ralph, to see you both.
Ralph: (handing *coat and hat to Ben)* Thanks, Ben. (to the *ladies)* I'm really sorry to barge in like this. Has Lynette been back yet ?
Constance: *(surprised)* Why no, Ralph. We thought she was with you.
Ralph: *(sits down in chair across from them)* She was earlier today, but we sort of had a tiny... misunderstanding. Well, maybe more like a fight. (to *himself).. No* , couldn't be a fight. A fight means I took part in it, I didn't... I left. (to *them)* But, if I would've stayed... It would've been a fight.
Jessie: Oh no, Ralph. What happened ?
Ralph: We were at the brunch, and I could tell she was in one of her moods.
Constance: How so?
Ralph: (embarrassed) Well, she started throwing around these big words, trying to impress everyone with this fancy talk about stuff I really don't think she knows much past the pronunciation of *! (stuttering* a little) She told me I was a... well a .. a wimpy fool, and I didn't have any idea how to make her feel like a woman. (blushing) Then she told me I wouldn't know an... *(has trouble pronouncing)* .. an and-ro- gid, no an androgynous zone! If it flew up and bit me on the nose ! *(clearing his throat)*
Now... I know what a handicapped zone is, a parking zone, and even the twilight zone ... but I don't believe I've ever heard of any..androgynous zone! *(Everyone is sharing his embarrassment, we hear a surpressed laugh from the kitchen.)* Where does she get this stuff? A book? I tell you! A man can only take so much... well ... humiliation !
Jessie: *(hesitantly)* Ralph.. *(as delicately as she can)* .... You know, I think *(assuredly)* In fact, I'm positive the word is ... erogenous, with an, "E" .
Ralph: *(righteously)* No. She spelled it out for me. (He *takes* out a *cocktail napkin, waving* it like a *flag.)*
Constance: That's my Lynette. The mouth's moving in high gear while the brain's in neutral.

Ralph: *(smiles wiping his brow with the* napkin) oh.. *(seriously)* ..Then she started in on Jessie.
Jessie: *(mouth drops)* Me?
Ralph: Yeah! About New York, the great parts you'd been getting, your big producer husband, and the baby that you'd both finally been blessed with... *(looking at both of them, hesitating)* ... after seeing a fertility specialist in Switzerland. (both *ladies are speechless)* I know ! She added that last one and it hit me, like a ton of bricks. That fantasy was worthy of Disney!

I confronted her with it. Big Mistake. She was like a hungry lion, and I was the beef cut of the day. Before she did too much damage, Reverend Wilson, asked everyone if anybody had jumper cables, Miss Moddell Smith, had a dead battery. *(laughing)* Better her battery... than my duck! I left after that without even going back inside. *(worried)* She's gonna kill me.... *(to Constance)* Do you think she found a way home ?
Constance: *(shaking her head)* When is my daughter ever going to learn ? You can't rearrange other people's lives, personalities, or their thinking, to suit her needs! (to *Ralph)* My daughter's like a cat. She always lands on her feet. I'm sure she found her way home.
Jessie: *(upset)* I can't believe she made up all those lies!
Constance: Those aren't lies to her. There's a grain of truth in them somewhere. Lynette justs expands on it.
Jessie: Before, I was a little nervous walking down to the landing. Just think somebody passing by on the ferry might see me. Now, I'm afraid to walk past a window, or answer the door. They'll all be out there expecting something I'm not!
Constance: *(Calls for Ben, who's been listening* at the *door the whole time.)* Ben!
Cruthers: *(answers* in a *flash)* Yes Ma'am!
Constance: *(noticing his quickness)* Would you unlock the cabinet and pour us all a small brandy ? *(to them)* I think we all need to calm down. *(he does quickly, handing them out, downing one himself)* Thank you, Ben. *(he starts* to leave) Ben. You can stay. *(smiling)*
Cruthers: *(embarrassed)* Yes, Ma'am. *(Just then, we hear* the *.rather loud sound of the front door. It is Lynette, returning home, more mad than tipsy.)*
Lynette: *(Taking off her coat, throwing* it at a *chair, Ben tries to catch* it.) Well, well. Looks like I've come home just in time. *(walks around them as she takes off her gloves)* Ya'll look like a bunch of cats after the canary. *(Picks up an empty glass off the table, sniffing it. She puts it back down with a smug look on her* face.) So, Ralph, what kind of crap have you been spouting ?
Ralph: (noticeablely uncomfortable) Nothing. I ..we..we were just...
Constance: *(saving him)* We were just discussing a name for the baby. (being *extra* polite) Why don't you sit down with us ? (patting a *space on the*

couch next to her) Please, help us decide on a name.
Lynette: *(Walks over to stand directly across from Ralph,* in a *very confrontational* tone.) You left me stranded, in front of everybody in town, looking like a damn fool! You slob! I don't know why I even give you the time of day.
Jessie: *(standing up to her)* Mother! Why don't you leave him alone ?
Lynette: Who asked you ?!
Jessie: It's me you've been wanting to tear apart. For all those years like I'd done it all deliberately !
Lynette: It was all an accident ?! Are you blaming your failure of a life on STUPIDITY ?! OR IGNORANCE ?
Jessie: My failure of a life ?!Stupidity ? Ignorance?!
Lynette: *(mocking her)* Oh, at least she can hear!
Jessie: Ignorance ? Yeah, I'm guilty. Because I was too young to know better. You've lived your failure of a life through me, ever since I can remember! Stupidity ? No way! Because I left, as soon as I was old enough to hold a job.
Lynette: Me live through you ?! If I had my way you would've gone to school and married a good career minded boy. Not run off to New York city in search of wild dreams. What did you find, huh ? Nothing but a nobody ... who got you knocked up and dumped you ... Like yesterday's garbage!
Jessie: Is that how you think of me? As yesterday's garbage?
Lynette: *(mockingly)* If you act as such, you'll be treated as such!
Constance: *(noticeably upset, flushed)* I think I've had quite enough of this.
Jessie: (to Lynette) You didn't like the way I turned out ? Well then you must not like the reflection you see in the mirror, Mom. All those ballet lessons, voice, charm, and the clothes. The clothes. You dressed me up like I was your own personal, lifesize Barbie doll. You want to know what the bad thing about it was ? You never saw me through it all you saw yourself. *(walking back* a couple *steps, as* if to take a better *swing at her)* ; And then when you saw you didn't like the way your picture turned out. You simply .... repainted it to your liking. You don't like the way my life turned out, so you change it... so that it looks good for all your friends! WHAT THE HELL-GIVES YOU DRAMATIC LICENSE ON MY LIFE ?
Constance: ENOUGH !! *(stands)* I don't care what's gone on in the past ... We are FAMILY, and.. *(to Jessie)*.. this is your Mother. (to Lynette) ..This is your daughter. You will treat each other with respect.

(to Jessie) Your Mother may have given you all those things. The ballet, the voice, the charm, and the clothes because she wanted you to have the best. I watched her scrimp and save, working days, and going to school at nights, to give you those things.

Do you want to know about those clothes? She couldn't afford them, so she'd go to the store and pick out the prettiest outfits. She'd look at them so carefully, she'd memorize them. Then she'd go home and make them herself,

no one ever knew the difference. She didn't want them to know, she couldn't afford them for you. *(she walks* to the *French doors, looking* out)

Frances tried to give her money, but she wouldn't accept it Too proud. Frances finally convinced her, with my help, to let him provide her schooling, and a roof over your heads as long as you needed. *(She clutches her heart, as if it's breaking, Ben notices.)*

(to Lynette) And you. You should be ashamed. The way you treat people is appalling, and the way you treat yourself is... is sad. What is it going to take, to make you realize what you're doing to yourself and everyone around you ? How many people are you going to push away ? Who do you have to lose, before you give it up ? *(holds on to* the *table for support) (everyone is quiet, watching)* I want you both, to find your love for each other again, before I leave.

(to Ben) I need to go lie down. Ben. (*He goes to her, helping, leading her towards her room, stage* left) No. Not there. It's time. I want to go lie down upstairs. (*He looks at her, shocked, knowing) (They go up towards the stairs, there is a light coming from* the top of *the stairs that is usually darkened. The door that is usually closed, is cracked open. She stops, turning to them, saying)* I think you both need to do it soon.

Ralph: *(jumps up)* I'll go call a doctor!

Constance: I don't think that's necessary, Ralph.

Ralph: *(He stops, startled, confused at what to do. Ben motions to him to go ahead and go, quietly. Ralph makes* a quiet exit, *through the kitchen door.)* ..Ah

Constance: *(to Ben)* Please, Ben.

Jessie: *(realizes)* NANA !

Lynette: *(sits, almost collapsing on the* couch) Mama ?!

Jessie: *(crosses to Constance on the stairs crying)* Nana. Please . I need you. The baby... We need you.

Constance: You make going upstairs to lie down sound so serious! Talk to your Mother. You need to find your friendship for each other again. She'll help you. *(puts her hand on Jessie's hand,* patting gently) I'm so tired. I've waited so long for this day. You've come home. You've stood up for yourself. (loudlv *for* Lynette) I have faith in your Mother. She's changing.... I think you'll be best friends.

I miss my Frances. I want to open my eyes and see him again.

Jessie: *(holding on to her hand, afraid to* let go) What can I do ? There has to be something.

Constance: (serenely) I have everything I need. *(Turns, breaking free of Jessie's grip, going up the stairs. The light* at the top *of the stairs is now, very bright.)*

Jessie: Nana. The baby's name, I've decided.

Constance: *(turns)* Yes ?
Jessie: (proudly) Frances Alan McCullough-Tobin.
Constance: *(smiling)* I'll tell my Frances. He'll be so happy. *(With Ben's help,* they exit *through the door* at the top *of* the *stairs, closing it behind them.)*
Jessie: *(crying, sits* at the *bottom step)*
Lynette: *(Quietly, goes over to her, taking her by the arm, pulls her up giving her* a long *embrace. They are both crying, quietly.) (From stage left, we hear a faint baby's cry. He is not screaming, just beginning to wake, hungry.)* Well...
(Composing herself in a *whole new manner, reflecting a whole change of disposition, and heart.)*... It sounds like my grandson is hungry. (reflectively) Grandson. Frances Alan McCulloughTobin. That's quite a lot of name for such a little fellow. *(smiling)* But, that's quite a boy.
Jessie: *(drying her eyes with her sleeve)* I'll go get him.
Lynette: May I ? I don't believe we've had the chance to properly meet. *(Jessie nods, smiling)* - What do you think of him calling me, ..Mimi ? I don't think I look like a Grandma . There can only be one, Nana. Besides, I think I look like a Mimi. *(she exits, stage left, towards the sound of the baby)*
Jessie: *(standing* at the *stairs still) (We hear the door* at the top *open, Ben comes out, turning off* the light, *closing the door. He comes down the stairs, holding a book in his hand.)*
Cruthers: *(hands her the book)* She wanted me to give you this *(They walk out* to *the middle of the room.)*
Jessie: *(turns towards the French doors)* How is she ?
Cruthers: *(shaking his head)* She wanted you to have her journal. She's kept it since I can remember. It's got everything she's heard, thought, or felt in it. It'll keep you close to her always...You might learn something valuable from it. I did . *(remembering)*... She used to take me down to the rivei-landing when I was a little boy, and teach me to read from it. She always wrote down there. She loved it down there. *(Turns and walks to* the *front door)*... I never told anyone this, including Miss Constance... I'll always have a special love for her. They don't make them like her anymore.
Jessie: (turning *to him)* Where are you going ?
Cruthers: I'm not that young anymore. I think I want to see a little of the world out there, 'fore it's too late. (*afterthought*) ..And you ?
Jessie: Down to the River landing, to her favorite place. I've got a lot of reading, thinking, and a little crying to do.
Cruthers: You ready to face all those people ?
Jessie: I'm ready to face anything. *(They both turn* to exit. *Ben leaves* via the *front door, closing it behind him)*... Yeah. I think I'm ready. *(Jessie exits via French doors to the River landing.)*
Scene fades: the scrim comes down. The footlights come up slowly and we see,

Ben , dressed in his traveling clothes. He nods to the audience, and *takes a harmonica out of his sack.*

Cruthers: (to the audience) That was some turn of events, that day. Life at Oakshadows was different from that day on.

(sitting on the edge *of the stage)* Miss Constance, she was sure one for knowing how to illustrate a point, and her timing.

Well, I always thought she belonged on a stage somewhere. She was able to show -em that change was okay. Then she showed 'em the way, like a conductor on a train.

I'd have to say Miss Jessie did the biggest turn around that day. Changed from a caterpillar to a butterfly. She grew up. *(stands up)* Went from scared, to able to stand up for herself. What Miss Lynette did I don't call change as much as I call it uncovering what was there all along.

Oh Me? Yeah, I changed. For the first time I spread my wings and left my nest. (laughing) A sixty-seven year old fledgling, ain't that something!? *(picks up his bag)* Now, I'm bound for where ever my two feet take me. And when the time comes... *(takes harmonica out of his pocket)* Why, I'll be homeward bound too! *(he exits, off the stage playing an old gospel hymn)*

THE END

SECOND PLACE
MCCCWA

GLIDING SCENE

SOARING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

AKIRA HOWARD

One day my friend Cornpopper--I gave him that name one summer because he tried to pop popcorn and burned it--and I were rocking in his beat-up, brown rocking chairs on his porch, reminiscing about previous trips that we had taken. I suggested to Cornpopper that we travel to the Appalachian Mountains, since we weren't doing anything.

"Why don't we go on another adventure, Cornpopper?"

"Sure, why don't we?"

"Why don't we try to float to the Appalachian Mountains?"

"Okay, I just hope this hair-brain plan of yours doesn't blow up in our face."

"And just what do you mean, blow up in our face?"

"Do you remember the time we were traveling so fast that we hit a mountain side in those jet-propelled motorcycles?"

"I had to admit that was kind of wild and crazy but that wasn't all my fault, I didn't make you come along with me, Corn pop head. Just wait, I guarantee you'll want to fly with me."

After that day, we lost contact with each other and I started building a windglider. I continued to work day and night on this windglider across the summer and I completed it by the middle of November.

This windglider was something out of the ordinary. The wings resembled an eagle's wing, the body resembled a falcon, and the nose portion resembled a parrot's head. The interior was a royal blue velvet that was soft as cotton.

The day after I completed my windglider, I went over to Cornpopper's house, and again we rocked in the same beat-up, brown rocking chairs.

"Well, well, well I have finally completed the windglider. Do you want to go and take a look at it?"

"Why you little weasel of a friend, after that talk we had about taking a trip, I haven't seen you nor have you bothered to call. Yes, I want to go see this creation of yours."

We leaped into my outdated pick-up and sped over towards my barn. After traveling down the long and narrow dirt road, we arrived at my barn next to the runway. We sprang from the pick-up and walked into my old dark barn.

"Just look at it, isn't it beautiful."

"Tomorrow morning, I'll come by and pick you up."

After a sleepless night, the day of the voyage was here and I couldn't

believe it, we'd be flying my windglider in just hours. I said, "We'll reach new heights today, Cornpopper," when I went to pick him up.

Cling! Clang!

"I'm coming, I'm coming, hold your wind, John."

"Why did you slam the door to my truck, man? You nearly broke my window."

"Did you forget a plane and a pilot to get us started?"

"No, I didn't. I've packed everything that we'll need for the voyage. I even told Pablo, the airplane pilot, to gas his plane and hitch it to the windglider."

We "jumped" into our gear and off to the air strip we went, just on the other side of my barn.

"Say John, hurry up and get into the glider, man. I'm so anxious to go."

"Hold your horses, Cornpopper. I have to tell Pablo that we are ready to leave. Say Mr. Pablo, calling Mr. Pablo. This is a radio check, over."

"This is Pablo, over."

"When I count to three, start your engine and taxi down the runway. But before we go any further, did you hitch the glider and airplane, over?"

"I've already done so, over."

"That will be all, Mr. Pablo, over and out."

"Yo Cornpopper, fasten your seat belt because we are going to soar into the clouds!"

"Mr. Pablo, Mr. Pablo, we are ready, over!"

"I've been ready for the past thirty minutes, over."

"Here I go, Mr. Pablo. One, two, three!"

"Say, it looks just fabulous up here, doesn't it? We are flying among clouds that look like big dragons and looking down on trees that look like one gigantic carpet with houses in the center of them. Now, isn't that beautiful?"

"I guess so."

"Man, you just don't appreciate how good things look, do you? Huh, go ahead with your bad self, Mr. Hateful. Look at those houses, man, if I were a giant, I could crush them with one foot. Just a few minutes ago you were very eager about flying."

"I have to admit, John, it does look pretty good up here."

"Come on, Cornpopper, sing with me. I-I-I can fly high-igh-igh in the sky. There is nothing that can get in my w-ay-ay-ay."

"Be quiet, you have always been a terrible singer."

Clump! Blump! Tung!

"Say John, did you feel that?"

"Feel what?"

"A bump against the glider. There it is again!"

"I do believe we have a problem, Cornpopper."

"What kind of a problem?"

"We seem to have flown into some rather strong turbulence."

"I bet you didn't check the latest weather bulletin, did you?"

"I forgot."

"You always for...we are going to crash, John! We are going to crash!"

The wind began to rumble and roar as we flounced and fumbled through the air.

"Help! Help! Help! I going to make you pay for this, John."

Minutes later, we crashed somewhere on a snow-capped mountain peak filled with snow.

"Cornpopper, where are you?"

"I'm over here, you dipstick. I should've known not to join you on your hair-brain adventure."

"There you go again, telling me about hair-brain adventures. You mustn't forget, I didn't make you come along with me."

"Shut-up! This snow is really coming down. Let's move over to that cave."

"What cave?"

"Come, let me show you. Oh no! I can't move my legs, John."

"Let me check the glider for the radio and for supplies."

"Were there any matches, John? I'm cold."

"Let me drag you to the cave and I'll start a fire. The radio seemed to have survived the crash."

"Hello, Hello, is anyone there? If you can here me, my friend and I are stranded on a mountain peak somewhere around Virginia. Our coordinates are D243765, over."

Tiss! Tiss! Tiss!

"Still no answer, John?"

"No."

"John, hurry, I hear a helicopter!"

"Hey! Hey, down here! Our coordinates are D243765, over."

"What are you doing down there? You were so far away that I received large amount of static on my radio. I barely heard you."

"My windglider crashed and my friend is hurt."

"I'm going to get help, Mr."

Thum! Thum! Thum! And he was gone for help.

"Hurry and gather your things that are nearby so when he returns, we can leave."

"What do you mean gather your things? Here I can barely move and you say 'gather your things.' My legs feel as though they are about to break off, and my finger hurt from placing them in the ice to help support my leg and you then say, 'hurry up.' You must be out of your mind. I wish the helicopter

man would hurry up and return because the more I sit talking to you, the more I get upset over you not checking the weather bulletin. That reminds me, you didn't test the brakes on those jet-propelled motorcycles, that is why we crashed on them."

Thum! Thum! Thum!

"Here he comes again, John. I didn't realize that helicopters sounded so loud."

"Hurry up people, let's move him carefully because he has no feelings in his legs."

"We need to get to the hospital because I am worried about his leg. By the way, my name is John and this is my friend Cornpopper."

"My name is Luke and my friend's name is Simon. It will only take a few minutes to make it to the County Hospital. By the way, how did you manage to crash up here?"

"Well, it is a long story. To begin, I built this windglider and we decided to take it for a test flight."

"Sorry Sir, but we are now at the hospital. We'll have to hear the story another time. I told you it wouldn't take long."

"Boy, will you be able to land on that launch pad while it is covered with snow and ice?"

"We'll be able to land on the snow and ice pretty safely without slipping because of the special ice picks on the bottom of the helicopter."

"Say Doc, let's hurry up and get Cornpopper into the hospital. I think his leg is broke."

"Let's wheel them inside nurse. By the way, I'm Doctor Ikthy and you are."

"My name is John. Just examine my friend, this is no time for chatting.

"Nurse, roll Mr. John to the examining room on the left and roll Mr. Cornpopper to the operating room on the right and prep him for surgery."

"Hey wait, Doc, wait! I want to say something to John. John, John, are you listening? I never want to speak to you again. Let's go, Doc, that is all I have to say."

After they examined me, I waited until the nurse returned to tell me that Cornpopper was out of surgery and then I left. A few weeks later, I was rocking in chair on my porch when a taxi pulled into my yard. It was Cornpopper with a cast thigh high.

"Say old fella, what are you doing?"

"Not a thing at all, as you can see."

"Do you want to sail across the Hudson Bay?"

"I thought you didn't want to ever speak to me again, Cornpopper."

"Well, I began to realize that it wasn't your fault that we crashed and that my leg was broken and that I almost lost my leg...."

"Enough already, I get the picture."

"John, I began to realize that was the most fun I've had since we crashed into the mountain side on those jet-propelled motorcycles."

Cornpopper and I settled our differences and sat relaxing--this time on my porch--thinking of a new form of unusual transportation. I said to Cornpopper, "It is hard to separate two old friendships and adventurous natures like ours." Months later, we built a floating car, but that's another story....

Seth Allen - Illustrator

CONTINUING "A WORN PATH"

LINDA DUNNAWAY

Phoenix left the building and walked along the busy street. She had one hand tightly fastened around the medicine in her apron pocket, and her other held her small cane. Phoenix crossed the street, hurrying as fast as she could to get to the Five & Dime just down the street. When she entered the store, the saleslady asked, "Can I help you?"

Phoenix quickly answered, "Yes, ma'm, I needs to buy a little paper windmill for my child."

"I'm not sure there's one left in the store, but come with me and we'll see," said the lady.

Phoenix's heart saddened for a moment, but picked up quite soon when the saleslady told her happily, "You're in luck this Christmas Eve! We have one left and because it's the holiday season, it's only a nickel."

Phoenix stood still as if frozen by the cold December day. After a moment her lips moved and she whispered, "God surely watching over me this day, and I thanks him. Here I come this long way empty handed I was, and now I even has a nickel to spare. I do wonder what will happen next."

While the saleslady was putting the little windmill into a box, she asked Phoenix if she would like the box to be wrapped in a bit of bright red paper left over from a larger gift. "My, oh, my!" Phoenix said. "I never in my life had hold of any boxes wrapped in red. Oh, yes, ma'm, that's what I would like." The box was wrapped in beautiful, red paper, and the saleslady attached a bright green ribbon on top of the box and said to Phoenix, "It's small, but wrapped so bright, I'm sure your child will like it. I sure hope he does."

Phoenix took hold of the little box, her eyes opened wide. She paid a nickel for the gift and started to the door. The saleslady spoke with a happy voice, "Merry Christmas to you!"

Phoenix said, "And to you." And out the door she went.

"I must hurry on my journey. It's getting late and my boy is all by himself and I want to see his face when I put this in his little hands," Phoenix whispered to herself. "He be so happy. I know he will."

Leaving Natchez, Phoenix could still hear the Christmas bells ringing. She walked on steadily. Starting back on the familiar path, she smelled woodsmoke and the hint of someone frying chicken. It was getting late, and she knew she had a long way to travel ahead before the sun fell behind the sky.

Just outside the bright, shining city of green and red lights, Phoenix heard a voice calling to her. "Granny! Granny!" Phoenix turned her head toward the voice and there walking towards her was a woman who looked to be about forty years old. Phoenix stopped and asked, "You talking to me, Miss?"

"Yes, I was," she answered. "I see you pass through these parts quite often usually coming through early before noon and then on your way back

close to this hour each time. You have a long walk, I reckon? Thought you might be hungry or thirsty, so I wait for you since this is the holiday season to give you a bit of marble cake and a jar of punch to help you on your journey."

Phoenix said with a smile, "This day, I reckon, has been the best to remember." She thanked the lady and told her of her long journey ahead and that she had to hurry the best she could because her grandson was waiting for her.

It wasn't long before Phoenix was crossing the swamp. She reminded the alligators to keep on sleeping. She went through a ravine where a spring flowed through a hollow log. Stopping here to sit a moment on the old log and enjoy her piece of cake and drink, Phoenix thought, "I should be able to find my way in the dark through here. No telling how many steps these old feet have made."

It was time to move on. She checked her little wrapped box and slid it back into her apron pocket along with part of the marble cake. "Can't wait to see that boy's face," she said and started back on the path.

Traveling through the corn patch, Phoenix was trying to locate where she had come earlier in the day, but there was no path to be seen. She traveled on, pecking her cane in front of her as she went. She heard a dog bark. "Sun's getting lower," she cried to herself traveling the worn path home. "The time gettin' gone fast."

A white man appeared close by with his dog on a chain. "Well, Granny!" he laughed. "On your way home?" It was the hunter who had lifted Phoenix out of the ditch earlier that day. "Tell me, Granny," he asked in a much kinder voice than he had used earlier, "what takes you on such a long journey at your age? It sure must be important because you have really been traveling today. Just sit here a moment and tell me." He pointed to a nearby log for her to sit on. "I won't take no for an answer." he said.

Phoenix still felt a little uneasy about the nickel the hunter had dropped earlier. Phoenix sat on the old log and told the hunter about her journey and of her sick grandson at home alone waiting for her. Phoenix told him about the medicine her grandson had to take and about the paper windmill she had bought for a nickel. She pulled out the nickel that she had picked up off the ground earlier and told the hunter, "I pick up this nickel after meeting up with you this morning. Guess maybe you dropped it." She held the coin towards the man.

He looked at Phoenix with disbelief and said, "No, Granny, I told you this morning I would give you a dime if I had it, so it looks as though I still owe you." Pulling out a shiny nickel, he handed it to Phoenix. Then he said it was getting late and that he would help her get home safely. Phoenix stood up straight and looked up towards the heavens and said, "God still looking on me today."

Phoenix moved a little side to side in her steps as she got closer to her home. She told the hunter that he didn't have to see her all the way home

because she had made the trip so often. The man told her it was Christmas Eve and he had nothing else to be doing. He had hunted all morning and killed quail for supper and now he had time to kill. He said he was glad to give her a helping hand. Phoenix thanked the man for all his help and for the company along the journey home. When they reached her house, the man went on his way.

When Phoenix reached her door, she took out the pretty wrapped box from her pocket and straightened the shiny green bow on top and headed to the bedroom. The grandson was sitting up in bed, peeping out from under the patchwork quilt with the sweetest look on his face. Phoenix said, "Look at what I brought you all the way back. I will help you with it." The boy's eyes brightened up. "But first," Phoenix said, "it's time for the soothing medicine." He held the little box wrapped all up in shiny red paper.

After taking his medicine, Phoenix helped him open his present carefully, so the pretty paper wouldn't get torn. "This here is the prettiest I have ever seen," Phoenix said. The little boy nodded his head. They opened up the box and lifted out the little paper windmill. The boy's eyes opened wide and shined like Phoenix had never seen before. "This is worth all the trips to see my boy's eyes so shiny. Yes, sir, this has been our best day, Grandson. Yes, our best day, Grandson. Our best day is today."

After supper Phoenix was tired from her long journey. The boy had fallen asleep with his wonderful toy close by. The next morning would be Christmas Day. Oh, what a Christmas Eve we have had Phoenix thought to herself. Nothing seemed to be able to get any better.

Early the next morning when Phoenix woke up, she got out of bed and went to the door to check if there was enough wood on the porch for the cold day ahead. "Lordy!" she exclaimed when she looked out, "What's been going on here last night?"

There were two strange boxes on her porch. One box was filled with fruit and cake and quail. The other box contained a ball, a picture book, a jacket, a cap, and a little toy train. A smaller box was inside the larger box. Phoenix looked around to see if someone might be close by resting before moving on with their things, but she couldn't see anyone at all. "I guess that these belong inside," Phoenix murmured.

After bringing the boxes inside the house, Phoenix opened the small box. She couldn't believe her eyes and said happily, "My, my! The Lord does truly bless me this day! A brand new red dress just my fittin' and a new apron to match!"

Phoenix excitement spread through the house and as she danced around, she turned to see her grandson standing in the doorway of his bedroom, his little paper windmill turning slowly. Phoenix stopped and stared at him and then cried out "Child! My child, you walking!" she exclaimed and then in a prayerful whisper "Oh, Lord, You has come to visit us this Christmas."

Shadowed Reflections

Julie Curtis

She seems to have always been with me. Even now I am very aware of her presence. She guides me sometimes in a positive, fruitful direction and sometimes aimlessly nowhere. On automatic you might say, as the heart itself beats in every living being. Her sadness envelopes me as tightly and dominantly as does a new mother's grief over a lost infant. Internal bereavement that pierces raw nerves in agony. Her own pain is deeply embedded in the fibers of her innerself. It is ever present in her life as she is in mine. We are always together. She is shy and prefers that only "I" acknowledge her existence. Her anger at times can turn to rage and leave her broken in despair. Her tears seem to defy the yearning and need she has to experience the healing power that only tears possess. Our feelings and emotions forever bonding us as one, are often entwined in a maze of confusion. She can be silent and has on occasion caught me off guard.

Sometimes she shares with me about her young life and in whispers she will tell me what she looked like. "I was small and very skinny" she will say. "I had long stringy brown hair." "My front teeth were broken off at a slanted edge." "Do you remember?" she will ask me. Yes, I silently tell her. My skin seems to swell with rushes of love and compassion for her. Instinctively I know I must be her protector. Time has reversed our roles. I am the older one now and she is the younger. Yet I feel uneasy as I realize that my life is controlled by her. And I know without having to be told that she is the stronger of us. Tiny flickers of panic increase the speed of my breathing, and I begin to feel pressure on my chest, as we continue our look into the past...

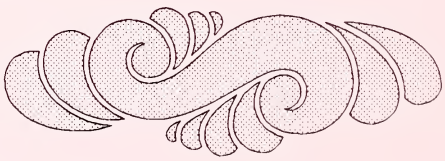
Home was as violent as a battlefield. Alcohol, drugs, sex, physical and emotional abuses were rampant. These "evils" controlled the environment where the "giants" lived and the child, the most vulnerable of human spirits was trapped. The "evils" were demeaning. Alcohol, physical and emotional abuses was enforced by "Addiction." Mercilessly, addiction destroyed any goodness that attempted to rescue the child. Callously the "evils" brought "Shame" into the household. Shame brought extensions of its self. Helpers to aid in the war of dehumanization. Denial, fear, anger, humiliation, cruelty, hopelessness and sorrow were kept very busy. They worked tirelessly on the "giant's" addiction and the vulnerability of the child. A sickness filled the home, as despairing as a terminal disease. Like puppets on a string, the "giants" yielded to the mastery of the "evils."

Survival skills were learned early in the child's life. The "evils" were nourished and kept active by the "giant's" anger. The child's perception of anger became as sharp as the blade of a warrior's sword. Like an eagle's prey

she knew only one response to that threat. Hide. When she was caught by anger, physical violence rained down on her. Blows were most often to her face. Pleas, screams and even begging went unheard in the "giant's" fury. The "giant's" strength fueled by anger, left her inert on the floor on many occasions. She knew the sticky, unnatural taste of her own blood. She was familiar with hunger and the suffocating blackness of confinement. She was an obstacle to addiction and was dealt with unemotionally. Time dragged at its own leisurely pace when she was locked in the darkness of a room. It could be a respite, a resting period used to comfort herself as only a child can do. She learned to withdraw inside herself to hide. Cowering, she tried to muffle sobs that might draw the "giant's" attention. To be invisible was safer. She learned to hate, to mistrust and to live in fear. Control and silence were her assets. In controlling her feelings she began to unlearn them.

Today we are one. She has given to me all that she is. I am the older but she is the controller. A handful of gentle, loving people give of themselves on a consistent basis to us. Always trying to heal the wounded inner child that dominates what I would do. At times we struggle with each other. She is damaged by hate and self-destruction in an occasional battle that requires outside help. I remember her survival skills well. To disappear. Hints of anorexia. Fear or stress to activate the retreat switch. Withdraw inside the self to hide. Intense depression. Anger in others to be avoided at all costs. I seek out gentleness in this cold, self-promoting world. I look for a quiet strength found rarely in "other" selves. I do not wish to sacrifice that child by leaving her in our past. Desperately, with a feeling of time running out, I search for a way to avoid what we believe to be our hereditary fate.

Alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and violence turned inward, strive to carry on. The "evils" are still with us, for now in our mirrored image stares the "giant."



Alzheimer's . . .
Who are the Real Victims?

Leisa Gill

Mary knew something must be wrong when her mother failed to show up for the mid-week prayer service at church. She nervously waited until fifteen minutes past starting time and could stand it no longer. She slipped quietly into the church's office to use the phone. Her mother seemed surprised that this weekly meeting had slipped her mind. Mary was equally surprised, since her mother had not missed a meeting in nearly 10 years.

This is a fictitious story, but all too true of the first subtle signs of what is commonly known as Alzheimer's disease, a disabling condition first reported in 1906 by Alois Alzheimer, a German physician. The medical society first resisted his ideas, reasoning that the changes were a natural part of the aging process. The controversy that greeted Alzheimer has long since been put to rest (Check 25).

Many cases of Alzheimer's disease are often misdiagnosed in the earliest stages. Those suffering from the disease have often been diagnosed as having arteriosclerosis. This is a condition many older adults may develop that is marked by fatty deposits in the arterial walls that can cause forgetfulness, confusion, and disorientation.

With Alzheimer's, one of the first bodily functions to be noticeably affected is speech, which progressively deteriorates as the disease advances. Most victims experience "empty speech" that makes no sense to the listener.

Check points out that as the disease progresses, "common sense and judgement disappear." Some patients even exhibit bizarre behavior including shoplifting in a grocery store (Check 26).

Eventually Alzheimer's victims begin to demonstrate more emotional disturbances such as depression and withdrawal from social settings. In the final stages, some Alzheimer's victims experience incontinence and an inability to walk. Some may end up curled into a fetal position, thus requiring constant care.

This brings me to the point I wish to focus on. . . the caregiver. Often times it is the caregiver who is subjected to the frustrations and hostility of their loved one. It is emotionally painful to see the changes one's mother or father is going through. Many Alzheimer's patients do not even recognize their own family, and may even resist the care they are trying to provide. The Alzheimer's patient's demands on the caregiver's time may increase feelings of "grief, anger, love, and frustration" often leaving the caregiver feeling powerless over the situation (Roberts 8).

In the course of writing this paper, I visited in the home of my husband's

cousin who cares for her mother, a victim of Alzheimer's disease. In this thirty minute visit I came to understand more about this frightening disease than in all of the material I have read on the subject.

When "Aunt Berniece" was about 62 and ready to retire from her job as a librarian, she began to exhibit a few small signs, but managed to drive her car and lead a fairly normal life; however this is no longer the case for she requires constant adult supervision. At 70 she is doing remarkably well in most aspects, and I personally think it is because of the love and care she is getting. Many Alzheimer's patients experience a much more rapid decline in mental and physical abilities.

As I was talking with Joyce, (Aunt Berniece's only daughter), I found myself feeling so sad for her. When I asked the question, "Do you feel cheated by having this burden?" she replied, "No, Mama would do the same for me." This is clearly a case of love and devotion for her mother. Joyce did explain to me that it has not been easy and that everyone has had to make sacrifices of their own, including her three sons. She told me of how they have been asked to give up a bedroom and have lost a lot of their privacy. She has also had to "child proof" her house in a lot of ways. As I observed the rooms near where I was sitting, I noticed that the kitchen has been chained off to prevent an accident in that area. Joyce stated that Aunt Berniece tends to put things in her mouth and will even swallow them. She is careful to keep pins and needles out of her sight.

As for expense, Joyce receives her mother's Social Security that covers most things, and the remainder is absorbed by Joyce and her husband. The majority of the expense is to provide day care in the home since Joyce teaches school during the day.

Social life is not as it once was for Joyce and her family. Someone always has to remain at home. In many ways, caring for an Alzheimer's patient is like caring for a baby, but you can't just pack a few things and go with an adult.

Those who care for parents or relatives with Alzheimer's often feel torn between loyalty to the ill relative and their responsibility to other family members (Landar). As Joyce put it, her worst fear is wondering if one day her sons might feel that she directed more of her energy and attention into caring for her mother than for them. Knowing Joyce and her family as I do, I believe this is a needless worry. Her sons have handled the situation well. They assume responsibilities in caring for their grandmother better than most granddaughters could have. They share the love that their mother has for Aunt Berniece.

One common trait among Alzheimer's patients is occasional aggression and hostility usually directed toward the caregiver. The best way to handle this, according to Joyce, is to avoid doing things that she knows will upset

her mother. Joyce said that if she wants a particular blouse or pair of pants it is best to allow her to wear it rather than face an emotional upset.

The patient's primary caregiver often has no one to turn to who understands what he or she is going through (Mittleman, Mary. "Help Needed for Caretakers of Alzheimer's Patients" The Daily Leader 19 October 1992, 4). Joyce does occasionally talk with a friend whose own mother suffers from the disease. She said that they compare their feelings and sometimes have a good cry. Often the caregiver feels all alone and that no one can understand. I suppose that is true. Unless we have been in that situation it is impossible to know how difficult it is.

Above all of the hardships and adjustments that go along with such a tragic disease, Joyce revealed that the hardest thing of all is missing out on a life with her mother that could have had so much meaning. As with all Alzheimer's victims, she is physically alive, but no longer mentally alive.

We must not be too quick to criticize those who care for the growing population of Alzheimer's victims. We must not judge them for the decisions they are forced to make. Until we are faced with the enormous task of giving endless, unselfish care to a loved one as Joyce and others like her must do, can we fully understand the sacrifices they make.

D. Jeanne Roberts puts this into focus when she says:

> *Simply stated, you who are caregivers are very valuable people in your own right as well as for your caregiving skills. Take pride in who you are and what you are able to do. Give yourself credit for your accomplishments. Judge yourself* ***NOT GUILTY****, and accept the very best that life can provide for you. (14)*

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My Brother, Mishap Matt

Dan Kitchens

"Mrs. Kitchens, your baby is going to be all right, although it was born with a broken collar bone." This seems to be the trend for my older brother Matt's life. Ever since I can remember, and even before, as I'm told, he has been breaking things or just plain out having bad luck.

As I said in the beginning, Matt was born with a broken collar bone. This was only the tip of the iceberg. When he was nine he got a new bike and wanted to ride it down our long, gravel driveway. Halfway down he wrecked out and broke his collar bone. At age eleven he got a brand new bike from Wal-Mart. The same day he wrecked out and broke his collar bone again. As if the boy's collar bone hadn't taken enough, when he was thirteen he broke it playing football.

Sometimes children have a problem with their ears not draining properly. When this occurs tubes are placed in the ears to help the drainage. Matt was, in first grade, considered a slow learner. My parents soon found out that he wasn't a slow learner; he just couldn't hear! Matt had a 65% hearing loss. Normally one set of tubes will be placed in a child's ears. Occasionally two sets are required, but not in Matt's case. He had seven sets over an eleven year period. Matt turned from a C, D student into an A, B student.

When Matt was five years old he was climbing the closet with one of his friends. There were shelves all the way to the top of a twelve-foot ceiling. Just as they got to the top, Matt fell and broke his elbow. To this very day he claims his friend pulled him down.

At age sixteen Matt and some friends were riding 4-wheelers in the woods, a potential disaster for Matt. He rounded a curve and met a pipe concreted in the ground. Soon thereafter he was to have surgery to repair the hernia he had received on the 4-wheeler. When the doctors went in it was too big of a mess; they couldn't repair it. Only Matt would get shaved and cut open for nothing. It took a second operation to put Matt back together.

Then there was the time Matt tried to stop a fork lift with his foot. His toe has not forgiven him yet. Soon after that he tried to play cowboy without benefit of saddle or bridle. He got thrown from a horse and broke his ankle. Now you might say that everyone breaks his ankle at least once. Just to prove that he could do it better, Matt had the bone come out of his skin and mess up a good boot.

My story would not be complete without telling of Matt's driving history. Before he turned fifteen Daddy decided to teach Matt to drive. They went out in the country, and in Daddy's Volvo, Matt hit the barn door. He will never

understand how the car got into first gear. He swears he put it into reverse. Soon after this he was in our driveway backing up his truck with the door open. He caught the basketball goal and put the door on the fender. As if his driving career hadn't been bad enough, when he was sixteen he totaled out our daddy's brand new BMW.

Nothing major has happened to him lately. All we can do is to wait and keep our fingers crossed. That is, all but Matt. If he tried, he would probably break one.

Josh Wright - Illustrator

JOURNAL: FREEWRITING

RONALD SCOTT MOODY

The journal is a tool to me. It is an avenue, an on-ramp to a highway, if you will. I never realized how much good simply writing things down seems to do. It actually satisfies a part of me. I always have thoughts spinning through my mind that seem to boil to the surface. At times they consume my conscious thinking. And to satisfy my need to stir the steaming kettle of my mind, I talk to myself. As I entered a college English class and started to write in a journal and would write down these bubbles of my thought patterns. They began to form stories, articles, or poems that I was quite proud of. Also, as I wrote, the ideas would "cook" and change into matured versions of the topic and the writing would become more complete with every word. It seems that as I continued to spoon out ideas and thoughts, surprisingly, instead of the kettle running dry it would only boil over with new, fresh ideas. My mind began to be more creative. And as I read, reread, and had friends read the writings. I would move pieces, replace them, take them out, but mind you, not to be thrown away. To be returned to the stew and allowed to simmer a while until they were needed again. The stories would start to grow into works of art, in this artist's eyes anyway. And, who cares if someone isn't interested...I am. My writing is for me, if a person cares to read my thoughts, I may let them. Then again, I may not. Writing helps me to be a better individual, and helps me get to know better, who I am. That is the real purpose for writing. But, feel free to use it anyway you like. After all, it's your writing. Tell stories, make up stories, but never turn down the flame under your mind's kettle. What a waste that would be. Be aware, watch the pot occasionally to see what is coming to the surface. Jot it down. Develop your ideas into a full four course mean, and enjoy it. Don't dread the journal, befriend it. It will always return your investment, but remember, no investment, no return. Try it, it could become an addiction, as it has me.

A Harvest Day

Beth Selman

The last of the leaves had fallen over two weeks ago with the first frost of the season, making the Lee field in Arm now ready for harvesting. Being one of my favorite soybean fields, because of its expanse of openness and being in the wide curve make it easy to watch the entire field during harvest time. Perched on the hood of the farm's old one-ton pickup, the sights, sounds, and smells overtake me. Crisp, cool, and so clean is the air. The breeze is slightly blowing the stalks and rattling the beans in their pods, sounding like maracas in the distance. The ready to harvest stalks are easily smelled as they are being crushed and eaten by the green John Deere combines. The large yellow teeth of the headers look like huge monsters turning over and over reaching out to devour each bean stalk, trying so carefully not to lose a single pod. The hoppers of the giant machines are growing full from their labors.

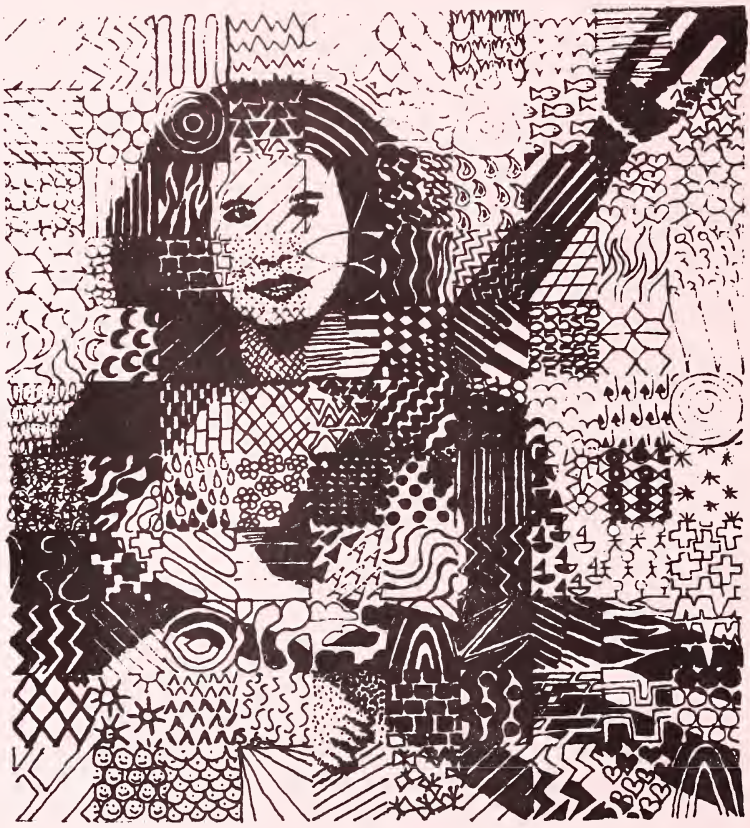
The wind carries the sound of the whining from an eighteen wheeler in the distance. Selman Farms' Peterbilt rounds the curve headed toward the field pulling an empty trailer so that the now bulging hoppers can be dumped. Steering into the field, the driver hesitates as he studies which angle is best for his approach. He halts the truck and steps out on the runnerboard to check the direction of the cutters. Squinting as he looks into the sun, I see the crows' feet that line his eyes which have grown deeper and deeper through the years. His face is red and chapped from the sun's light and the cool dry air. A face I know all too well, as that of Jimmy's, my husband of twenty-three years. He makes sure the ground is firm and packed before he backs the trailer into the field. He does not even have to step down for he knows the land as he knows his name.

Even with all the noise and commotion, Jimmy motions to me to look toward the northeast corner of the field. There in the bottom a strong, proud, buck struts, with his nose high in the air. The wind evidently carries the sounds and smells of our activity from him, for he relaxes, sensing no danger. Out of the tall, thick underbrush a doe meanders, nudging her young in front of her. As though it was their own private patch, they graze on the strewn beans lying on the ground missed by the combines.

Shorter are the days now. The sun is slowly falling in the west, hovering just above the grand oaks with their array of multicolored leaves and the tall pines that are woven into the fence row which lines the massive, lonesome, three-hundred acre field. The sky grows with streaks of bright oranges, strong yellows, and deep pinks. A jack rabbit hops along between the rows and the field mice scamper about to their burrows before night fall.

The dew will soon begin to fall, reminding us that a harvest day is not nearly as long as a planting day, and signaling quitting time for the cutters. Churning their way toward the end of the rows with their hoppers bulging over, the combines slowly pull up along the sleek empty trailer and unload their harvest of what has been a long, lonely, grueling day. With the trailer loaded, and the tarpaulin strapped down, the driver waves as the mighty Peterbilt pulls out toward the setting sun, leaving a trail of smoke from the exhaust stacks. His day is far from over. Vicksburg, the mighty Mississippi river town, waits as he makes his third trip of the day. The bean mill stays open round the clock, loading empty barges full of soybeans for export to foreign lands.

Bob calls to Marco on the C.B., "Shut it down, Marco, most of it will still be here tomorrow. That ole buck and doe can't eat it all in one night." "Ten-four, Bobcat," Marco replies, as the lights go off and the engines shut down. Rising in the east is the full, orange, harvest moon casting its glow on what has been a full harvest day.



Melanie Beard - Illustrator

The Chill

(after hearing of a death)

Stacy Foster

The chill cold of the brisk wind
makes a pain filled within
Stab into my heart
like a tree falling on such a helpless
small creature
Till death comes upon it
like frost on early morning grass.
The chill cold has such a moral meaning
yet for me it still has not been discovered.
I think it is like a shadow of pink ballet
slippers
with pink roses consisting of ribbon like that
on a deadman's grave
against the light so dim,
but then again it could be like
two lovers quarreling over frail
but yet meaningful things
When grace such as crystal chandeliers
hung up in a mansion
where now a dead man used to live.
The dead man looks upon the western sky
as the sun sets with colors scattered
as a small child would paint
so careless and carefree.
He thinks it to be like the leaves on the tree
which shed his blood as the leaves that fell
never to return again
such as he will never be again
on the earth land to touch
the roses are to do as he has planned
For his grave grown cold and lonely
but he can still hear the howling
of the chill, cold wind
on his casket as he awaits judgement day.

WRITING:
OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

CHARLES H. THORNTON

We desperately need people in our world who can make a difference, those who will operate on the cutting edge of life to make the world about just a little better place to live and work in. Writing for me affords such an opportunity.

I remind that the only world we ever know is that world in which we are present. It is that which occurs in the present that determines the desirable or undesirable consequences of the future.

I remind, too, that there are natural and physical laws that operate in our universe. There are also moral, ethical, and spiritual laws. These latter are most important for a viable healthy society. None of these laws can be transgressed without bringing into play an undesirable consequence. Each of us can make a difference wherever we are as long as we remain within the bounds of these laws.

I love this country enough to try to make a difference. I owe a lot to the American people. I have been fortunate enough to have had a role in forging a part of our history. My name will be entered in a Freedom Foundation Book of Memory at Valley Forge when I expire.

One memory permanently limned on my mind is the Flag of the Cross and The Stars and Stripes atop the mast of a ship at sea bringing me back to freedom.

Whenever I see Old Glory waving it reminds me of our heritage from a people who made a difference in our world.

Wave Old Glory:
Every time I see Old Glory waving,
the flag of the United States,
it brings to my remembrance
the blessings of
freedom.

I remember that One who said,
"If you continue in my word
you are truly my disciples,
and you shall know the truth
and the truth shall set you
free."

I recognize the convenience of mobility,
the right to move about
unmolested by suspicious authority
requiring documents of travel,
going where I will,
free to be
me.

I appreciate the wisdom of franchise,
that freedom to choose
those who govern,
and when they govern badly,
the right to cast them
from their
office.

I enjoy the fellowship in assembly,
and freely associate with whomever,
to have discussion without
fear of being persecuted,
not spied upon or
silenced by
force.

I read the printed pages
of newsprint or magazines
to become more grateful to all
who fight for the free flow
of information without
censorship.

Each time I see Old Glory waving
reinforces a grateful acknowledgement,
and moves me toward thankfulness
to the God of my Faith
that I was born in freedom
an American.

Doodle-Buggin'

Debra Johnson

Humid afternoon heat of the Mississippi August day creates mirrored mirages that evaporate into rippling waves just above the purple, blue highway. The thick, sultry air drains the energy of Robert Stegall. He tries to make small conversation with his youngest son, Martin, who moved to Simpson County two years earlier to take a higher position with an insurance company that he has been with for the past five years.

Robert cannot remember the last time that his skin stuck to the vinyl seat of a car because of the heat. Sudden afternoon showers are common in southwest Mississippi, and although the sky is clear, Robert secretly prays that a small storm will come to cool the countryside. This weekend marks the first time in two years that Martin has made an effort to be with him, and Robert wants to make the most of their fishing trip.

The cramped space in the car does not allow Robert's large-framed body ample room to maneuver into a comfortable position, and he wonders why his son, who has inherited his body build, has settled for an economy size car. Four hours of traveling time crunched in the car while being sealed to the seat by sweat seems to be a small price to pay for the quality time that Robert knows he will be spending with Martin at the lake.

In an effort to divert his attention from the heat, Robert gazes out the window at the seemingly endless rolling, green pastures that are dotted with grazing white-faced Angus cattle. The pastures gently laps into thick walls of long, needle pines.

Martin's large, round face is covered in sweat beads that occasionally drip on his lips. The salty taste makes him thirsty. He feels badly about the air-conditioner. In an apologetic voice he says:

"We'll get a cold soda at the next store, Dad. Sorry about the air-conditioner. Guess it has a leak. Don't really know if it will ever get fixed seeing that the only repairman in Simpson County can't find the problem. Funny guy, the repairman--dips snuff. Gosh, it's an experience doing business with Jim. Can't understand a word he says because his mouth is so full of the mess. But it usually doesn't matter. He never finds the problem anyway. He just beats on whatever needs fixing with a wrench and tells you to 'bring her back if she doesn't work.' Dad, are you listening?"

"Yeah. Does he have a brother?"

"Don't know -- why?"

"'Cause if he does, I think he might be the repairman in Copiah County. We have our snuff-dippin', wrench-beatin', all purpose handyman, too!"

"Guess there's one in every county, huh, Dad?"

"Yep. I reckon so, Son," Robert replies.

As they round the next bend in the road, it seems as if they are wrapped in a green envelope of cascading vines and moss that hang from tall evergreen trees and power lines. Martin glances at a sign posted by the highway.

"Adams County -- would've known it anyway--without that sign. It just seems to swallow 'ya up with red clay banks, Spanish moss, and kudzu. Didn't you use to live here for a while, Dad?"

"Yeah, Son, -- years ago, but I only stayed long enough for your grandpaw to do a little construction work. I must have been fourteen or fifteen. We moved when his job finished. All this twisted, green mess scattered around everywhere brings back memories. I can't remember the last time that I ventured over this way," Robert says.

"Now that you have retired, maybe you can come more often, Dad. Your heart attack freed some time. I know taking early retirement bothered you. Never have understood why you decided to teach special education. And I've surely never understood why you always became so attached to your students. Stress cause it -- couldn't leave those little buggers and their problems at school, could 'ya, Dad? Now someone else will have to be worried into a heart attack by them. You can look forward to sunshine and fishin' -- no more worries," Martin proclaims as he shifts his weight in the sticky vinyl seat.

"They didn't worry me, and they certainly didn't cause my heart attack. You have adopted some of your mother's philosophy, Son. If it were left up to me, I would be in the classroom with those 'little buggers,' as you call them, right now," Robert says in a very irritated manner.

"Well, Dad, I'm looking forward to spending time with you. You always wrapped yourself up in teaching, and, of course, my job selling insurance kept me on the road so much that we never seemed to have time to enjoy each other's company. I'm in a position now, with the new promotion and all, to take the time, and I plan to do just that. Can`t wait 'til we get to the lake. Sure hope the perch like our new tackle," Martin says.

The strong, stagnate odor of digested wood from the International Paper Mill saturates the humid air. Martin knows that Natchez cannot be far away.

They stop at a small country store that smells like peppermint and cardboard. Cobwebs line the open ceiling rafters, and dust drifts in the stale, sweet air. Muffled by the humming of motors from ancient coolers, the faint sound of country music can be heard. Robert notices an old wooden radio behind the counter. It reminds him of his grandmother's radio. Nostalgia fills every nook and corner of the store. An elderly man who looks as if he crossed the Red Sea with Moses greets them.

"How can I help you gents today? Let me guess -- came in for cold drinks. We've had a scorcher this year. Bet the shucks on the corn will be thick come

fall. We keep the drinks in the ice box back there in the corner. Help yourselves," the old man says.

As Martin opens the creaking lid to the chest-type box, he whispers to Robert while handing him a root beer: "Can you believe this? I didn't think stores like this still existed! Wouldn't surprise me if we see dust settled on the ole boy when we get ready to pay."

Robert pays for the drinks, and, as the pair walks toward the car, Martin hears his father say: "Seems as if Rip spent too many falls wrapped up in thick corn shucks."

After they travel about ten miles south on Highway 61, Robert looks out the window and sees an antebellum home. His attention focuses on long forgotten memories of his life in Natchez. Without realizing it, he begins to speak instead of think. "Magnobelles," he says under his breath.

"What? What did you just say, Dad?" Martin asks.

"Guess I said magnobelles, Son."

"What are magnobelles?"

"The ladies who stand around looking fresh and pretty in those big fluffy dresses and dainty wide-brimmed hats during pilgrimage. You know, walking, talking magnolias."

Martin's face lights up like candles on a dark night. After taking a swallow of root beer he says: "I've always wondered what those ladies are called or if they even have a name. Magnobelles -- it's perfect!"

"That's exactly what I thought the first time I heard it," Robert says.

The two men finish drinking their cold sodas. Then Robert begins to tell his son the most amazing story. Martin listens and is pleased because his father never talks much. He has always been reserved. Idol chit-chat, to him, has always been considered a waste of time.

"A friend introduced me to that word," Robert says as he places the two empty soda bottles under his seat. "He always said clever things. His name was Dewey. He secretly hated his mother for giving him that name. He would work himself into a rage about it. His long, sandy, brown hair would flop over his eyes as he jumped up and down. His face would turn red, and he was out of shape and over weight. He'd fall to the ground in exhaustion -- kind of looking like a fat, panting, shaggy dog. Green eyes would stare at me through all that hair."

"Why did he hate his name, Dad?"

"Because the kids at school said that the name suited him. They said that he had dew on his brain. They made fun of him all of the time, and his name certainly didn't help anything. He became my best friend, and it would hurt me when the rest of the kids poked fun at him," Robert replies.

Martin wonders why anyone would have made fun of such a clever

person, but before he can ask, his father continues telling the story.

"Dewey was dyslexic. He couldn't read or write, Son. But if someone took the time to read to him, he could throw all the facts back without blinking an eye. He could compose stories that would challenge the imagination of every teacher in school. Unfortunately, he couldn't write those stories down. Sometimes I would write as he dictated, but the teachers would not accept his work."

"I think that I'm beginning to understand why you chose special education," Martin says.

As he fans himself with a piece of newspaper that he has found discarded on the back seat, Robert continues:

"Dewey quit school – just couldn't handle all of the pressure. We remained friends until your grandpaw's job put my family back on the road. He taught me how to doodle-bug. He spent a lot of time doodle-buggin' -- said it helped him to think. I haven't seen a doodle-bug hole in a long time. I can see him so clearly in my mind. He is stretched out on the ground with his hair dangling over the small hole as he bites his upper lip and pokes a long piece of grass into it. When he got lucky and caught one, he would examine it. He was always careful to return it to its hole. Dewey's curiosity sparkled. I spent many afternoons doodle-buggin' with him. I didn't know it then, but my being adventurous with Dewey helped restore his self confidence, because it was shattered to hell and back. Someone like Dewey became labeled lazy, dumb or retarded. They just didn't have a chance."

Drifting deeper into his memories, Robert continues his story. "I didn't know that such problems had names, but I knew about the problems because of Dewey. After I had finished college, I went to Natchez to try and find him, but no one knew where he was, and it seemed as if they didn't care. Someone did tell me that Dewey had started drinking heavily and that he had spent all of his free time doodle-buggin'. One day he just disappeared, but before that happened, he had acquired a nickname, Dewey, the drunk doodle-bugger."

"I'm sorry about what I said earlier," Martin says.

The afternoon heat yields to a pleasant evening breeze. Robert peels his skin from the car seat for what he hopes will be the last time. He realizes that the sun has fallen behind a row of trees in the distant horizon, and he is surprised at how fast the time has passed.

"Can't believe that I talked so much, Son. Didn't mean to monopolize the conversation. I don't usually carry on like that," Robert says in a sheepish voice.

"Don't be silly. I enjoyed listening. There's not much chance of you telling me the same story twice!" Martin replies.

The conversation then turns to fishing. Robert and Martin review tactics on how to hook the "big one." After each decide how to reel in that monster bass of their dreams, silence fills the air.

As they drive in the direction of the lake, the sky becomes filled with brilliant pink and white streaks. A faint chuckle breaks the silence when Martin says: "Magnobelles. Who would have ever thought of that?"

Honorable Mention MCCCWA

I'm Trapped

Jon West

My path is decided by choices I do not make
Told what to think, where to go, who to be
I'm trapped in a cycle I cannot break.

All is said to be done for my sake
To prepare me for a future I can't see
My path is decided by choices I do not make

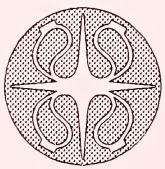
It doesn't matter if I'm a fake
As long as we agree
I'm trapped in a cycle I can not break

I try and try my escape to take
Yet I'm driven like a lemming to the sea
My path is decided by choices I do not make

The monotony of the days my soul does bake
Frustration and weariness bear heavily upon me
I'm trapped in a cycle I can not break

I've been conditioned like Pavlov's dogs to rake
Away the thought that I might be free
My path is decided by choices I do not make
I'm trapped in a cycle I cannot break.

First Place
Brookhaven High



Blooming Flowers Everywhere

Lacey Smith

Blooming flowers everywhere
Growing near the meadow's brook
The scent of blossoms fill the air.

Now and then we stop and stare
And catch the beauty as we look
Blooming flowers everywhere

They give a sense of love and care
And often times the petals shook,
The scent of blossoms fill the air.

The sun shines on the colors where
They live together in a nook
Blooming flowers everywhere.

Stems bind from the soft wind's care
From the fragrant buds I took
The scent of blossoms fill the air.

To tread o'er blossoms I shall not dare.
A perfect painting from a book
Blooming flowers everywhere
The scent of blossoms fill the air.

Second Place
Brookhaven High

The Apple Drug

Brad Boerner

& the serpent came to me in a vision
& offered vast knowledge
& individuality, immortality,
& godship
& i was persuaded
& i took of the drug
& it came to me as he said it would
& even more of which he hadn't mentioned
& my dreams were reconstructed
& my viewpoints were altered
& i began to trip
& fumble quite often
& discovered, with knowledge,

pain comes also

Third Place
Brookhaven High

The Quills of My Voice

Lisa Alexander

Quills of a porcupine sting to the touch
Such as a word leaving my lips.
Automatic responses thrown to protect,
What seems so important
Yet needs much neglect.
I myself am not truly endangered
Yet it is my brother whom my words destroy.
Countless times I give no thought
To the destruction my quills present.
Friendships lie in the hands of communication
And mine I now vow to protect
With this oath taken.
Not for the sake of myself,
But for the friendships my quills have shaken.

Staff Selection
Lawrence County High

Pathway of Pain

Kayla Fauver

Black roses hanging in the wind
Dead leaves lead the pathway
My heart has been broken open
Tears are flowing down
I smile on the outside
I wither helplessly inside
Pain has taken hold
My life just grows cold
I'm dying in vines of sorrow

Staff Selection
Brookhaven High

Illustrator - Seth Allen

The Little Brother

Mack McDaniel

"Will you help me with this problem?"
"Will you drive me to the game?"
"Will you take me roller skating?
By myself, it's not the same.
Will you, please?"

"Will you pitch to me 'til dinner?"
"Will you help me clean my room?"
"Will you show me how to make things
With your yarn and weaving loom?
Will you, please?"

"How do ducks float through the water?"
"How does rain get in the sky?"
"My bike is broken--won't you fix it?"
"Why don't birds fall down when they fly?"
"Tell me, please."

Pesky questions? Yes, I thought so;
And brushed him off with shrugs or sighs.
I didn't always try to answer,
And when I answered, told him lies.
"Go away, please!"

But now I long with all my being
To hear those queries once again.
For now his questioning lips are silenced;
Today his life came to its end.
"Forgive me, please."

Honorable Mention
Lawrence County High

Lord, Our Father

Bradley Crow

Father, Son, Holy Ghost, our blessed Trinity
You came and died to give us life.
You hold our hands through pain and strife.
Your nail-scarred hands have set us free.
No one is worthy of your forgiving grace.
The lashing you took, the blood-stained whelps,
At that moment in time, no one could help,
But through all of this, you still took our place.
All you ask of is our trust and loyalty,
To call you Lord, and to worship Thee.
He came, and he died, for you and for me.
They cursed him, stabbed him, and gave him no pity.
He only wants Christians to do one small part:
To keep His name holy and close to our heart.

Honorable Mention
Wesson High

IN SEARCH OF THE KING

JUNE COGHLAN

Paper and beer cans littered the narrow street. A dead cat lay near the edge of the road in the tall grass beneath a sign that read: "Welcome to Hurricane Proof, MS, Pop. 250." Just past the sign a yellow warning light flashed, the town's only traffic signal. Beyond the light sat The Screaming Eagle Cafe.

The black exterior had an eagle's head airbrushed on the side. A sign near the door read: "Jimmy Sykes, Proprietor."

Inside, Jimmy was tending bar under a sign advertising his dead aunt Mabel's fig preserves. "Try Some Today" the sign said. He'd been meaning to rip that sign down for months. His crazy old aunt had made a fortune off those preserves, and when she died she didn't leave him a single, sticky cent.

Jimmy was not a good-looking man. He wore a plaid shirt and overalls, blond hair plastered to his head by sweat.

"Shirley!" he hollered across the bar. "Git yore butt over here an' take over for me. I'm goin' on my break."

Shirley, the lone downtrodden waitress, flipped him off and sauntered casually to the bar.

Her earrings, perfect likenesses of Elvis Presley, banged against her neck. They were musical, when you squeezed the King's butt, they played "Heartbreak Hotel." A tremendous fan of the King, Shirley thought reports of his demise were greatly exaggerated.

Her polyester blouse clung to her back uncomfortably and her I-Saw-Graceland button sagged forlornly.

She scowled at Jimmy and slunk around the bar, slamming her tray down and opening a beer.

"Hey, you better pay for that, or it's comin' outta yore check," Jimmy warned.

"What check?"

"Listen, Shirley, if you wanna keep this job--"

"Oh, shut up!"

Jimmy glared at her and headed for the back room to enjoy his beer in peace. On the way back he passed the darkened corner where old man Cletus McBurn always sat. He came in every day for a drink and sat in the corner because he thought the fluorescent bulbs overhead were cooking his brain.

The old man called to Jimmy as he passed. "Turn them lights off! I can feel my brains just a cookin' away!" He plucked at the few gray hairs he had left, then clamped his hands protectively over his skull.

In the storage room Jimmy opened his beer and sat near the window,

looking out at Hurricane Proof. He saw the rundown two-story building that had housed the dry goods store during the town's better days.

He remembered going to the store with his mother when he was small. The groceries had been at the back, with clothes at the front and farming supplies upstairs. Things changed through the years, and the place gradually shrank in on itself until it was gone.

For one winter the upstairs had been put to use by a near-bankrupt chicken farmer who tried to raise quail there. Jimmy recalled with a snicker that the operation had just never gotten off the ground.

When he returned to the bar, he saw that Olion Newell, the town's oldest original living resident, had joined Cletus.

"They found her this mornin'," he was saying. "She was all swole up an' smellin'. They figger she's been dead a couple a weeks."

"Who's dead?" somebody asked.

"Ol' lady Pittston, the hermit. She got two grown young 'uns over to Alabama. That woman was somethin'. Never went outta the house. Used to send them kids everywhere. They used to come in the hardware store when they was just toddlers."

Cletus spoke up. "If you ast me, she had the right idear. You know, they's holes in the sky now that lets in nuclear beams. All them spray cans caused it. It's best to stay inside."

Jimmy herded Shirley back to her tables. She served drinks with a scowl. He really wanted to get rid of her, but he didn't know how. She'd been working at the bar since it opened, earning the money to put her crazy aunt in the nursing home at Hattiesburg.

Making her way back to the bar with a trayful of empties, Shirley snapped, "Jimmy, I gotta go check on Aunt Docie. I'll be back quick as I can, if she ain't turned on the gas burners or poisoned the neighbors cats again."

Aunt Docie hated cats. "They stare at me, Shirley. Git right up in the living room window an' stare me down. I don't like 'em. They come round while yore gone. Just you wait. They gonna come in whilst I'm sleepin' an' smother me. That what you want, yore ol' Aunt Docie smothered in her sleep?"

Shirley came home two weeks later to find six cats swaying and coughing on her porch and her aunt in the kitchen mixing up hamburger meat and rat poison.

She found out about the nursing home in Hattiesburg the next day. She secretly hoped some students from USM would get to experiment on Docie.

Jimmy watched Shirley leave. This was his favorite time of day. He no longer had to deal with Shirley's ill temper. He dreamed of replacing her.

As she left the bar, Shirley brushed past a much thinner, younger woman who was coming in. She gave her little notice, her mind was racing forward to the day she would unload her Aunt Docie on the unsuspecting nursing

home staff. It gave her chills. It would be the high point of her life. Except, of course, the day she would meet the King, who wasn't really dead. Everybody knew that. He worked for the FBI.

The thin young woman entered the cafe and headed straight to the bar. She smiled left and right, and leaned over the bar, batting her eyes at Jimmy.

"How ya'll doin'?" Jimmy asked.

"I'm not sure yet," she said. "Maybe you can help me. See, I need a job. I'm new here in town," she batted her eyelashes again.

Jimmy leaned heavily on the bar. Here she was, the answer to his prayers. He thought about Shirley, the way she scowled at the customers, and studied the thin young lady.

"What kind of experience you got?" he asked.

"Well, I was Miss Sweet Georgia Peach two years in a row, an' I was Queen of the Frog Giggin' Festival last year. How's that?"

Jimmy grinned. "It'll do."

When she got home, Shirley was greeted with the sound of Docie snoring loudly. Making herself a peanut butter and banana sandwich, she headed quickly back to the bar, thinking that the Valium she'd added to Docie's breakfast was the best idea she'd had in a while.

Back at the bar, Jimmy paced nervously. Shirley wasn't going to take this lying down. He hoped she didn't cause a scene.

The sound of Shirley's rusted out Lincoln in the driveway told him he would soon find out. She tramped up the steps and through the door. As soon as she opened it, she saw the new waitress.

"Hi, honey," the Georgia Peach said.

"Hi my foot," Shirley hissed. "Who's she?" she demanded of Jimmy.

He sent the Georgia Peach back to the bar and sidled up next to Shirley.

"Look here," he muttered. "Times are tight and I need a cute waitress with a pretty smile to draw in my customers. I'm gonna hafta let you go Shirley."

"I need this job, Jimmy. I've got my seniority. I got my rights. You can't take away my job when I need money an' you know I do. You'll be sorry, Jimmy Sykes!"

She stomped out to her car. This just wouldn't do. She felt along under the seat until her fingers met with what she was looking for.

Jimmy turned back for the bar, and as he did, the door flew back on its hinges. Shirley hefted a shotgun.

"S...," Jimmy said reverently. The Georgia Peach screamed.

"Shut up, baby," Shirley hissed.

"Now Shirley, I wasn't just wasn't thinkin' right, I--"

Shirley threw back her head. "SHUT UP!" she screamed, and Jimmy fell silent.

"That's better. Now Jimmy, you empty the cash register an' put the money in a sack. Everybody else git on the floor."

"It's germs down there," Cletus said.

"I said git on the floor!" The people in the bar dropped as one.

Jimmy emptied the register, hands trembling, and tossed the sack to the middle of the floor. Shirley snatched it up and backed out.

Inside her car she considered going to her house, then changed her mind. Docie could stay there for all she cared.

Shirley knew what she was doing now. She was hitting the road, like that movie *Easy Rider* she had once seen in Gulfport. She was going out in search of freedom. And the King.

Illustrator - Josh Wright

NICKY

AMY KITCHENS

"Nicky!" Alaina gasped. "What are you doing!" Her face was red with anger and she clenched her fists, thinking of things she ought not say to a six-year-old.

Her little brother was in the middle of her room, surrounded by a sea of her things he had dragged out of her cedar chest. He jumped as she spoke and looked up at her with a guilty look in his grey-green eyes.

"I was... I just..." Nicky blundered. Then he bit his lip as he glanced about him, as if he had not noticed his mess until just now.

Alaina, exasperated, heaved a sigh. What would Nicky do next? She remembered this morning when he dropped the whole carton of eggs on the kitchen floor. Mom made her clean it up. And when she had to drag Nicky along to the store, he announced to the world that she had made a "D" on her biology paper. He had tagged along when she was visiting her friend. He asked question after stupid question, like; "Why isn't the sky purple?" and "How come that boy in your class has long hair?" and "Why do older people write with squiggly letters that all hook together?"

"Nicky, stop pestering!" Alaina had shouted.

Now Nicky was... well, she didn't really know what he was doing, but going through her room without asking was the last straw!

"Nicky, I thought I told you never to come into my room when I'm not here!" Alaina's voice increased into a bellow.

"I thought..."

"No!" she interrupted him. "You're always doing something annoying! You're always in my way! Do you make a special effort to bother me every day? Do you? Well?"

Nicky's jaw dropped and his eyes filled with tears, but Alaina didn't really care! Not this time, no! He was spoiled rotten and needed to learn a lesson. "I wish you had never been born," she murmured loud enough for him to hear.

Nicky scrubbed his face with the back of his hand as he started to cry.

"Go on. Get out of here."

He was frozen in shock.

"NOW!"

Nicky ran from the room bawling and sobbing.

"Oh, shut up," Alaina thought as his cries grew into long, drawn-out screams.

"Why can't I be an only child?" she moaned as she slammed her door and trudged over to the mess. She pondered over this as she dropped everything

back into the chest and closed the lid. "Yes, I wish I never had a brother."

The next day was Saturday, and Alaina had planned to meet her friends Bev and Holly by the river. It was almost 11:45 and she hurriedly slapped together three sandwiches.

Bev was to bring the potato chips and Holly was to bring the drinks. The idea of a picnic enchanted her and she started whistling a tune she had picked up from the movie they had watched last Saturday.

She was smearing a thick gob of peanut-butter on a side of bread when her mother waltzed in. She clip-clopped down the hall in her new high heels, wearing her favorite earrings, and dressed in a pale pink skirt and blouse. Her thick hair was set nicely with curls that rested lightly on her pink shoulders.

"Alaina, I'm going to a wedding shower for my old college roommate, Roberta Ellens. Do you remember her?"

Alaina nodded. "Sounds like fun." Roberta had visited their home when she was eight. She had had to move into the baby's room while Roberta spent the week laughing and gossiping with her mother.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you last night. It was just so late when I came home from work and you were already asleep. I didn't want to wake you. Oh, will you sit Nicky while I'm gone?"

Alaina knew her mother meant this as a rhetorical question, but she opposed it anyway. "Mom, I already made plans to have a picnic at the river! Bev and Holly and I want to be alone."

"It won't kill you to take him along. I'm going to be late Alaina, please don't argue!"

"Bye," she sighed as she watched her mother bustle out the door, pop back in to grab her purse, then hurry away, walking briskly to the car.

"Nicky! Come on! We're going to have a picnic!" Alaina barked. He was always giving her trouble. He always had to tag along.

Nicky came charging through the back door, a smudge of dirt on his nose and his filthy hands grasping a small plastic shovel. The seat of his pants were grass stained and his bare feet had tracked dirt across the linoleum.

"Mom's going to kill you," Alaina really didn't care.

Nicky shrugged and waited to see what Alaina was going to say. He didn't care either.

"Put your shoes on. We're going to the river."

"I want to go bare-footed."

"Put your shoes on," I said.

Nicky stared at her defiantly, his eyes fixed and his chin raised. His fists were planted firmly on his hips.

"NICKY!...Fine. I'm not going to argue with you, it's useless."

He skipped down the sidewalk victoriously, knowing he should wait for

his sister before he crossed the street. Nicky looked over his shoulder with mischief, but waited there on the curb after he saw her glaring at him through the kitchen window.

Alaina dropped the sandwiches into a brown paper bag. She conveniently forgot and didn't bother making an extra one.

After several agonizing blocks, they finally made it to the river before she was shoved for the fifth time and before she could squeeze his wrist any tighter when he meandered dangerously toward the street.

Holly and Bev turned to wave. They had been basking in the sunshine and dipping their toes into the water while they waited.

Alaina turned Nicky around by the shoulders and looked at him seriously. "Nicky, please don't bother us. Find something else to do while we talk," she pleaded. Then she let him go and ran to her friends.

Holly passed around the sodas and spread a blanket across the ground. "Where have you been? We've been waiting here for ten minutes!" she teased.

"I hope you like sour cream and onion chips," announced Bev. She opened the bag and poured them out.

As they talked and gossiped, Nicky played by himself, upturning the soft, moist earth near the river with his hands.

"Maybe I've finally gotten through to him," thought Alaina. She slowly forgot about him and concentrated on her friends. Occasionally peals of laughter would rise above the roar of the water, the boughs of the huge oak trees swayed overhead, and the birds chattered and scolded as they swooped through the air.

Then, a sudden sound made everything stand still. The talking ceased, the happy singing of the birds slowly played out, and the wind imperceptibly halted. Alaina's heart had also skipped a beat. A terrifying shriek echoed through the stillness.

"Nicky," Alaina's face was deathly pale and her lips were dry. She caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure being swept past them in the river, a tangle of arms and legs splashing wildly about.

"Call for help!" she yelled at her friends and dove into the swift currents of the muddy water. "Nicky can't swim!" Alaina thought in anguish. Her own body seemed weak and frail as the strong waves tugged at her straining limbs. Every time she was forced under, she quaffed the ugly dirty water. Alaina dared not imagine the condition of her baby brother!

As a giant wave lifted her up into the air, she saw Nicky frantically grab for a tree branch and miss. Then she was plunged back into the river and Alaina didn't see him any more until she was carried over to the gnarl of branches that were half-way immersed under the water.

She almost didn't see Nicky in time to reach up and grasp the branch and

stop herself with a jerk.

Nicky's arm was caught in-between the fork of a limb and his head was held under the water by the strong currents.

Alaina didn't have time to worry. She didn't even have time to think. After pulling up out of the water, she steadied herself by leaning her back against a large log and pressing her feet against the stronger limbs in front of her. She slowly leaned over and with one hand held Nicky's face above the water. With the other, she managed to pry his hand from the sticks.

Alaina trembled as she looked into his face. It was cold and pale. His lips were blue and his closed eyes bore dark menacing circles.

Looking around for a way to escape, fear crept slowly into Alaina's mind. A wall of rock bordered each side of the river here. There was no way they were going to be found. How would they get out of this?

Suddenly, relief passed over her face. She had spotted a small outlet where the river had carved an area of water into the side of the rocky cliff. It had a small, grassy bank just big enough for the two of them. If she could only reach it in time before they were swept past it with the rapids!

Somehow she managed to hold on to Nicky and jump in at the same time. Alaina kicked furiously at the water and stroked as hard as she could with her one free hand. The weight of her brother forced her under the water, but she struggled back up long enough to catch her breath.

By some miracle, she was able to reach the small bank. Alaina laid Nicky down. He was still unconscious. She sat on her heels bending over him and shook his shoulder. "Nicky!... Nicky, please don't die," she begged. "I do love you. I didn't mean all those awful things I said to you yesterday! No..Please no. Oh Nicky!"

Minutes passed like hours as she held him close. She closed her eyes, wondering how long they were going to be stuck in this prison between the cliffs and the river. There was no way out!

Alaina jumped when a hand touched her shoulder. She turned and tried to smile as the paramedics helped them into the yellow life boat. Bev and Holly must have called the rescue unit as soon as she had jumped in to save Nicky. They were safe.

Alaina sat impatiently in the hard ugly chair of the hospital waiting room. She clung to the towel that had been given to her after her brother was taken away and shivered as a cold drop of water dripped from her hair and slid slowly down her back. How long had she been in here? Several hours, maybe? Alaina anxiously wrung her hands and shifted from side to side. Waiting was hard. What was happening in there?

She looked up hopefully as a doctor walked in. A stethoscope was draped around his neck and he was holding a wooden clip-board under his arm. "Miss Alaina Robertson?" he asked.

"That's me!" she stood up and held her breath.

"Your brother is going to be just fine," he smiled. "Nicky has suffered a fractured wrist and he'd inhaled a great deal of water, but you don't have anything to worry about. I got the nurse at the front desk to call your mother; she's on her way.

"May I see him?"

"One second," said the doctor and he motioned to a nurse who was standing in the nurses' station. "This is Rebecca. She'll show you to Nicky's room." He mumbled something into the nurse's ear then brisked away, his white coat flapping behind him.

Alaina followed Rebecca down several long halls with many, many doors. Each door had a number and under each number was a small box holding a card stapled to several pieces of paper.

They arrived at room 347, and before she entered, Rebecca made sure Alaina could find her way back.

Then she ran into the room, pushing the heavy door shut behind her. Alaina looked around. Several beds were lined up against the wall and toys were strewn across the floor. Two little boys were sitting on the carpet playing with tinker toys and one little boy was in his bed reading. She found Nicky sitting by a big blue table at the window and coloring a picture.

"Nicky! Are you all right? I was so worried about you!"

"Look, Alaina!" Nicky held up his broken arm and showed her. "I've got a cast! Toby and Andrew and Curtis signed it for me. Here..." he handed her a marker. "You sign it!"

Alaina knew he was glad about meeting new friends at the hospital and she didn't want to spoil his mood. She bent over and printed her name, then went back around it with a heart.

"There you go! At least it was your left hand. You can still write." Alaina stood back up and observed her artwork.

"That's what Toby said! Here, I drew this for you." Nicky handed her the piece of paper. It was a picture of a tall stick-person with a bow in her hair and a shorter stick-person holding her hand. It had a heart around it and over it was a message in a six-year-old's handwriting. It read "I LUV YU ALAINA. YU AR NISE."

"This is great, Nick-o! As soon as we get home, I'll pin it to my bulletin board."

He seemed pleased. He was grinning from ear to ear and bouncing up and down in his chair. Then Nicky bit his lip and looked down at the table. "I was going to make it yesterday, but you got mad at me," he blurted out.

"Oh, Nicky! I am sorry, but you really shouldn't have been in my room."

"But, I was out of paper and I couldn't find my colors. I thought maybe you had some. I didn't know you'd get so mad!"

A wave of shame swept over her. She had never felt so guilty in her life. Alaina looked down at the drawing in her hands and couldn't think of one word to describe her selfishness. Wretch...monster...devil!

She looked up with surprise. Nicky had put his arms around her and was hugging her tightly. She hugged him back. Alaina began to cry, but she wore a smile on her face. It was great to have a brother like Nicky!

HONORABLE MENTION
COPIAH-ACADEMY

Illustrator - Jimmy Riddle

The Empty House

Adam Watts

"Vroooooooommmm!"

"Honk!"

"SCREEEEEECH!!"

An 18-wheeler's brakes had failed turning off Route 7, allowing it to plow through a tour bus before it hit a parked red Ferrari. As it did so, a parking meter tore open a six-foot-long gash in the side of its tanker trailer, spilling the load of hydrazine into the shower of sparks created in the collision...

And so went the time between after school and supper on Tuesday. Today's disaster was not half as bad as yesterday's thirty-eight-car pileup, and the party responsible for both "accidents" and hundreds more similarly destructive catastrophes was already planning tomorrow's mishap.

This was the life of Jerry Pepper, a bright and energetic ten-year-old who imitated life not as he saw it, but the way he always wished it could be (sometimes, even, the way it was perceived in his mind). Jerry was the proud owner of a sizeable collection of toy cars, with which he played most creatively in his front yard. The busy street which ran parallel to and only a few yards from his own dusty street (which he called merely "The Avenue") probably fostered Jerry's interest in automobiles.

Jerry's fourteen-year-old sibling, Todd, preferred not to think that Jerry was too old for his cars, and even helped Jerry build complex city layouts sometimes. These weekend projects were always carried out in the backyard. Todd told Jerry it was because the dirt was better, but the real reason for his insistence on the more private location was selfish: Todd neither wanted to be seen playing with children's toys nor wanted to be kidded about his younger brother's doing so. Still, they were very close, and the bond between them was almost unbreakable.

One day, Todd came home with Love. Love can be wonderful, but Jerry will always remember it as that which destroyed itself between two brothers and for his happy life. Love was a girl called Jo, who became Jerry's personal idea of the embodiment of evil and the downfall of his recreational empire. In a very real way, she was.

As the weeks slowly wore on, Jerry was blissfully unaware of the increasing amount of what used to be his time and his territory in Todd's life being taken over by Jo, knowing only that Todd was home less and less, and that he was really not as interested in cars as Jerry had thought.

Then Construction Day arrived, the Saturday that Jerry and Todd had agreed to model the west half of their small town. Jerry excitedly jumped out of bed and dressed. After the usual handful of cold water on his face, Todd

was on his feet and after Jerry.

The brothers started their ambitious project as usual, dragging out of the kitchen and tool shed anything that could be used to excavate dirt. They worked quickly and messily, systematically scraping the general pattern of the streets as well as covering each other with red clay. Their work continued as usual until mid-afternoon, when Todd remembered that Jo was to eat with them that night. This revelation coincided with the spotting of a very distant rain cloud in the otherwise cloudless sky. Jerry remained firm, but even his most persistent arguments couldn't prevent Todd from retiring to the house to shower and make himself "presentable." Now unwilling to finish what had become a task, Jerry put up his shovels and buckets, returned the pots and spoons to the kitchen, and retreated with all his cars to the Avenue.

Later that evening, the rain came. It seemed to follow Jo as she ran up the driveway so fast that she didn't have time to speak to Jerry. Rather than occupy neighboring space with the entity who stole his brother, Jerry preferred to play in the rain with his only remaining friends. Seeing nothing wrong in playing in the warm downpour, and desperately seeking what child there was left in his brother, Jerry cautiously asked Todd to come join him and play.

Jerry knew what he had done, but not its consequences. By attempting to reclaim his brother while he had yet to escort his love inside, he evoked a stare from Jo that was next directed to Todd. Feeling the need to impress his new girlfriend, Todd snapped back, "No way! You know I'm too old for that, and so are you!"

Todd's words chilled the rain. Jerry looked down to avoid his brother's belittling expression and to seek compassion from his cars. The objects which were once his refuge from reality offered none. Instead he found them symbols of a part of his life he could never resurrect, and with a single motion of anger and despair, tossed his life's pride in the path of a delivery truck.

Feeling nothing now, Jerry turned and went inside into his empty house.

Second Place
Brookhaven High

THE POCKET WATCH

KATHERINE BRYANT

I was finally old enough to walk home from school by myself. Being eleven years old and in the fifth grade gave me more freedom. I remember the cool autumn breeze nipping at my nose and blowing leaves against my face. It wasn't a far walk because it was a typical small American town. I walked home the same way everyday so people got used to seeing me and didn't bother to wave. All except one old man. He used to pull out the same pocket watch every time I walked by.

He was poorly dressed and was humped over. Everyday he wore the same beat up old brown shoes, and old white shirt with holes in it, and the same ragged brown pants. He always carried a battered cane, and he had white hair and a mustache. It never failed; every single day he waved, and I gave a small wave back. I guessed he lived alone because the house was run down and the grass was tall.

I remember one day he said, "Jonathan, please come and help me move this large limb from my yard."

I agreed with a smile, but I thought it was rather odd that he called me by my name since we had never been introduced. But I helped him move it.

"Come in and have a piece of fruit and a glass of milk," said the old man.

"I'd love to," I said.

"You can just call me Old Mr. J," said the old man. "My friends used to."

"What do you mean used to?" I asked, like any boy who asks too many questions.

"That isn't that important now," said Old Mr. J. "Maybe we can be friends."

"That will be great!" I exclaimed.

"You can come over as often as you would like to," he replied.

"Well, I've got to get home; my parents will start to worry about me," I said. "Good bye!"

"Good bye, Jonathan!" he said.

As I walked home I started to think about him. Maybe he was a mass murderer or an escaped convict, or maybe he was just an old, lonely man looking for a new friend to keep him going.

"Hi, Mom!" I said as I walked in the door.

"And just where have you been young man," Mom said.

"I met an old man and helped him move a limb from his yard," I said.

"That was kind of you," she replied. "Now go wash up and get ready for supper; your father will be home soon."

"Okay," I said.

"Please bow your heads so we can say grace," Father said as Mom sat down at the dinner table.

When we got through saying grace I started to tell Dad about my day, but when I started telling him about Old Mr. J he interrupted and said, "Helen, please pass the salt." This seemed to happen every time I brought up the subject.

Just about everyday Mr. J and I sat and talked. He never said anything about his family so I never bothered to ask him about them. He was very interesting. He told me some of his war stories and a few stories of his childhood.

When I went home after my visits I would tell my Dad about them and ask questions about him, but every time I did Dad never answered any of my questions.

After a few days I never saw the old man. Finally I went to his door and knocked but no one answered, so I just walked home.

One day after I played a game of baseball the doorbell rang. It was a man with a briefcase. He was dressed in a coat and tie.

"Does Jason Newman live here?" the man said.

"Daad!" I yelled.

"Yes, what?" he asked.

"There's a man here to see you," I yelled again.

"I'm Jason Newman," Dad said approaching the door.

The man handed him a package, turned around and left.

Dad sat down on the couch and opened the package. As he emptied it on the coffee table a pocket watch fell out along with some old photos. The watch looked just like the one Old Mr. J had. Dad popped it open. It had engraved on it:

TO MY DEAR SON JASON
LOVE YOUR FATHER

THIRD PLACE
COPIAH-ACADEMY

MUSIC BOX

CARYN A. SMITH

Christmas Eve, 2048

A lone grey figure trudged between the piles of rubble. The sky, filled with lumpy bluish-brown clouds, had been sullenly raining all day. The wind gusted, blowing the damp garments of the girl as she stopped and looked around.

There was nothing to see. For miles around, heaps and rows of corroded, dripping debris spread like an enormous metallic fungus. Every so often a framework of torn, twisted iron poked massively out of the chaos, sharp edges raking at the howling wind. Sheets of rain swept over and around the landscape, hiding, then revealing, the devastation. Overhead, the clouds muttered.

Evie took it all in. She had been in the City often enough now to be immune to the hollow grief that the place seemed to radiate, and the sense of loneliness. Most people avoided the place because of that -- and other things -- but Evie had no real choice. She was a Scavenger.

She pulled her wraps tighter around her shoulders. The plastic poncho was keeping out most of the rain, but a few dozen or so of the thick, oily raindrops had still managed to creep under her collar and down between her shoulderblades. She shivered and sneezed.

It would be just her luck to catch something virulent just before Christmas! If she could just find somewhere safe to get out of the rain --

Evie sighed, and eased her way between two rusting piles of metal. She glanced at her watch (a rare find; Evie had been the one to discover the well-preserved jewelry store, and so had first pick) and saw that she had almost three hours of safety before she had to turn back. Nighttime was dangerous in the City, especially if one was alone. Wild dog-wolf packs were a problem, but they were mostly skittish of humans; and if one was smart and careful, they weren't too dangerous. It was the wild mutie cats, and the other Muties, that posed the real danger. The cats were huge and silent and incredible hunters. A really bold cat could have one by the throat before one even saw it. And as for the Muties -- they only came out at night. And even then they would avoid people, if the people were in a big enough group. But if one was alone....

Evie felt the hilt of her knife nervously. She could defend herself as well as anyone (thanks to the teachings of her parents), but the idea of being

jumped by grotesque Muties in the shadows of the ironwork towers was terrifying. She'd be very sure to be well clear of the City by nightfall.

The way cleared a bit, and Evie found herself on one of the rare remaining bits of asphalt that criss-crossed the ruins. It ran almost completely straight as far as she could see, dotted here and there by twisted lumps of glass and metal. The wind was pushing gusts of rain across the road's pitted surface. It would be cold out there, with no giant piles of rubble to block the wind and rain, but if she could find a bridge, she could take shelter beneath it. And she thought she saw one not far off....

Evie ran most of the way, her boots splashing in the rainbow-pearled puddles. The bridge was in good condition, and the concrete on the underside was smooth and dry. Evie checked, as always, for signs of animal habitation; of that there was no trace. She'd been lucky. Mutie cats liked the cozy caves beneath the support beams.

She huddled against one of the huge stone columns and ate a little bread and cheese from her backpack. She was running low on water, and was tempted to scoop some from a puddle, but figured the risk was too great. No telling what had seeped into the puddle from the asphalt. And rainwater wasn't exactly safe to drink either. She gulped a couple of judicious swallows from her canteen.

The rain slackened after a little while. She started walking again, hurriedly now. She had to find what she was looking for and get back quickly before anyone became too worried.

Evie was looking for a gift: a Christmas present, a relic from the City, for her grandmother. Her luck at discoveries had been pretty bad the last two months. Usually she was the best Scavenger in her family. She had had quite a bit of money saved, from sales of her finds, before their settlement was raided by pirates in the spring. That loss still smarted. That had been her apprenticeship-money....

Oh, well.... Evie told herself to forget about it. Most of the pirates were dead now anyway, killed when they tried to take a well-armed settlement to the north. If only she could have seen it....

Evie stubbed her toe on a lump of concrete. She hopped around on one foot for a minute, gritting her teeth to keep from yelling in pain. She sat down heavily, gripping her throbbing toes tightly to try and dull the ache. She berated herself for being careless. She could have tripped over it and sprained her ankle, and then what a fix she'd have been in!

The pain died down slowly, eventually leaving only a faint throb. Evie stood, and glanced again at her watch. Only an hour and a half left before she absolutely had to be past the City's boundaries.

She heard something. Suddenly wary, she stiffened, her ears straining to catch it again. There -- she heard it: a low, keening sound that rose in pitch

as the wind strengthened. It was odd -- a different sound than the one the wind made when it howled through the ruined towers. It was coming from beyond that huge pile of rubble....

She skirted the hill, and gasped.

Before her, in crumpled, broken pieces, lay one of the huge airplanes her grandmother had told her about. The metal of it, once white with painted designs, was now mostly blackened and sooty. Glass glinted in some of the little oval portholes that ran along one side. The plane lay on its side, one wing broken from the body and half-buried under it. The other wing was still attached to the shell and poked up above the debris in a way that reminded Evie of the stiffened wing of a dead bird. It cut the wind like a knife and produced the eerie sound that she had heard.

She hoped that not all the plane had burned. There might be valuable artifacts in it; ones that would bring a nice price at the next trade fair. Her parents would be so happy -- and there might be something in there for Grandma.

Evie examined the plane carefully. It seemed to be stable. She ventured to poke her head in through one of the gaping holes in the side. Moldered remains of seats lay everywhere. Grass and weeds were growing up through the floor. Some of the lockers above the seats, though, had apparently escaped serious damage, and, farther down, the plane looked to have been spared the flames altogether.

Evie wondered, offhandedly, if anyone had survived the crash. Then she got down to business. She started rummaging through the lockers, mostly finding rotted suitcases and bags with even more rotted clothing inside. In one, though, she found a velvet bag of jewelry; in another she found a plastic toy that squeaked when squeezed. She pocketed both.

Then she found her gift. In one dented locker far down the plane she discovered an old duffel bag filled with carefully wrapped packages. Most of the contents of the packages had decayed away, but one held something heavy, and hard. She pulled the rotted fabric from it and examined it.

At first, she didn't quite know what it was. It looked like a simple figurine of a little girl in a long yellow dress with a kitten in her arms, but there was a rod protruding from the bottom that connected it to a wide plastic base. Why was it attached to a rod?

Evie shook it experimentally, and it gave a high, metallic chirp. The base turned a little in her palm; she almost dropped it. Suddenly she thought -- could it be a music box? She remembered seeing one at the last trade fair, but that one had really been a box; it played music when the lid opened. This one didn't seem to have a place to open. She examined the base carefully, and gave it a tentative half-turn.

She was right! A few notes of an unfamiliar tune came from somewhere

inside the figurine, all light and clinky. She turned the base again, farther this time, and it played the entire melody. It almost seemed familiar, now.... Wait! She remembered! It was the tune to the song that Evie had often heard her grandmother sing, the one that went "rainbows on roses, whiskers on kittens," and then something about mittens. It was a pretty little song, but, somehow, when Grandma sang it, it was sad. The cheerful tinkling seemed out of place in the dripping grey wasteland.

But Evie cheered up when she thought about what a wonderful present it would make for her grandmother.

She arrived home later that evening, accepting the worried scolding of her parents and kin with a quiet face and a bowed head. Then she showed them her treasures (all except for the music box) and told, in a progressively higher voice, about her discovery.

All wrongs were promptly forgotten, and Evie was a hero. She was questioned -- "Are you sure you can remember how to find it again?" and congratulated -- "It's about time that bad luck of yours wore off, Evie-girl," and reassured -- "Yes, yes, we'll go back as soon as we can, you can be sure of it!"

Eventually, the excitement died down, the Christmas Eve feast was eaten, and the last toast to Evie's discovery raised. That night Evie went to bed early, all worn out. She hid the music box under her pillow, carefully wrapped in a flowered scarf. Once, as she tossed restlessly, unable to quell her excitement long enough to sleep, the music box gave a tiny muffled chirp.

In the morning, it was Christmas, the same as usual. The younger children shrieked and laughed, shredding the wrappings as they opened their gifts. The older people opened their presents with reserve and quiet smiles, and spoke of saving the wrappings for next year.

Evie gave her gift to Grandmother last. Grandma admired the scarf, read the note loudly, and finally unwrapped it. When she saw the figurine, her face got very still.

"Evie, where did you get this?" she asked, her voice suddenly quavery.

Evie wondered what she'd done wrong and answered, "From the plane wreck yesterday. It was in a locker." She then said encouragingly, "Wind it up. It's a music box."

"I know what it is, Evie," Grandma said. Tears began to find their way down her wrinkled cheeks, following the creases there. She twisted the base and the old melody played; a song that was dead to the world now, except in an old woman's memory.

"I got a music box just like this one for Christmas when I was about seventeen years old," she began, her voice just above a whisper. "It was the Christmas before the Asteroid.... The Asteroid hit a week after, on New Year's Eve."

She continued, her eyes on the turning figure of the little girl cupped in her hands. "I remember thinking it was such a stupid gift for a seventeen-year-old. I wanted a car.... My grandmother gave it to me. I remember thinking it was so corny. Then I turned the base, and I heard the music." A fresh wave of tears coursed down the channels around her eyes. "I loved that song. It was from a movie -- remember me telling you about movies? -- and I loved it so much. It was my favorite gift that year."

She paused, and shut her eyes. Everyone in the room was frozen, caught unprepared by her grief. No one knew of any words to comfort her because no one understood. This was her particular grief, and could not be shared.

She began again, her voice thick and rough. "I didn't have it long. We were going to fly to my aunt's house the week after Christmas, for New Year's. The airport was so busy, what with holiday traffic and all -- we almost missed the plane. God, if only we had...."

"I brought the music box on board with me. I didn't want to take the chance of its being lost if our luggage was misplaced. Everyone thought I was a little crazy to be so attached to something like that, but it was the only gift that really mattered to me."

She stopped, and opened her eyes. "You all know the story from here. The plane crashed while we were over the City, when the shockwave hit. And I was one of the few survivors. My folks didn't make it, not any of them."

She looked down at the music box again, that had long since stopped playing. She smiled: a kind of crooked, half-hearted grin. She looked at Evie. "It seems you have found my Christmas present for me," she said, and turned the base again, and the music played.

"..these are a few of my fav-or-ite things...."

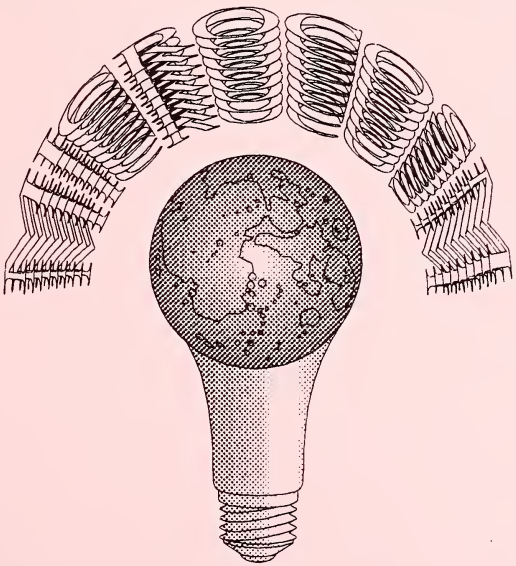
FIRST PLACE
BROOKHAVEN ACADEMY

The Performers

Melissa Rutland

Ever so strangely when the curtain falls
The show begins
They come one by one ever so mysteriously
Right on cue
And oh how they perform consistently
Night after night
Never any practice, never any mistakes
The audience raves
But no sooner than the show began
The curtain rises and the spotlight shines
The performers fade
Until the next show begins.

Honorable Mention
Lawrence County High



Illustrator - Melanie Beard

HOPE WILL CONQUER ALL

HEATHER RATCLIFF

A baby cries as it takes its first breath of air in the new world. In the background, there are sounds of both happiness and tears. A new baby is born.

The birth of a child is a time of the greatest happiness between two people. The only thing in this world a parent wants is to see and hear the sounds of a healthy, bouncing baby boy or girl. This was the hope of my parents fourteen years ago as they awaited the birth of their third child. Having two other very normal children, no one could have ever known that this child would be one of two out of 1000 babies each year born with Spina bifida.

Spina bifida is a midline defect of the skin, spinal column and spinal cord. Instead of the spinal cord forming a straight column, covered first by membranes and then by a bony spine, the membranes pooch out at some point along the back. Some or all of the nerves coming out of the spine below the sac fail to be connected properly the spinal cord and thus to the brain (Blackman 159).

The exact cause of Spina bifida is not known. This neural tube defect occurs at about 3 to 4 weeks gestation. However, there is no proven link between this condition and any medication infection, genetic trait or environmental factor (Clark 92).

Hope, like other Spina bifida children, has many accompanying health problems. She has partial paralysis of her legs and lacks some bowel and bladder control. In order to walk she must depend on the help of a full body brace that she wore when younger. Now, because of the discomfort of the braces, she feels more confident and in control of her needs in a wheelchair.

The extent of physical and mental problems varies with the location of the defect. The constant occurrence of many different problems, including socially limiting ones, affect almost every aspect of the children's life and theiir families' lives (Salter 115).

Many people do not realize the struggles and hardships that a handicapped, or "handicapable" person as we call Hope, has to endure. Just seeing her at school pushing herself up ramps too steep for even the people who built them to climb makes me realize all she overcome her daily activities.

People in wheelchairs have come a long way since the days when they weren't even allowed to attend school because they "looked" different. Now, they go to college and become practically anything they have ever dreamed of becoming. I believe in my sister's case if she put her mind to accomplishing something no matter what it might be, she would not rest until she did it. I

only wish we all could have her determination.

We have been brought up to respect Hope's limitation but not treat her differently because of them. The hardest feelings my family has to cope with are the discomforts sensed from her peers and the public. I can recall many times going into a store like Wal-Mart with Hope and seeing other children and even adults stare at her and her wheelchair. It has always been a joke to watch them because we usually just laugh it off. And do you know who laughs the loudest? Hope. She has a great attitude about everything. Most of the time I forget she is even in a wheelchair, until I have to move it out of the way in our house.

Because of the passing of the Disabilities Act of 1992 which recognizes the importance of quality of life for all individuals, there is hope for further modification to meet the needs of the handicapped. In the past and still today, however, there are many things that need to be done. My family includes Hope in everything. I can remember many times she couldn't get in the front door of a building because of steps or narrow doors. There were even times that Hope couldn't wash her hands because the restaurant did not have handicapped restroom facilities.

These problems, as well as many others, are just some of the things I know I take for granted. Most people don't even bat an eye when going up steps, or running, or playing sports. However, Hope doesn't let her handicap stop her. She is a very active fourteen year old with a beautiful voice. Each year, for three years, she has participated in the State Fair Country Showdown talent contest. She sings at our church, other people's church, Trustmark Bank's Christmas Festival, and all of our family reunions. One of her proudest moments happened this year when she was asked to sing the National Anthem at her school's homecoming. Everyone loved it; and so did she. She will sing for anyone who asks, and believe me, they will ask again. Hope is also a very active junior varsity cheerleader of three years which she enjoys a great deal. To see her determination to be an active participant in life despite her handicap is a great model for me as well as everyone around her.

Is there a cure for Spina bifida? No, to this date there is none. For now society must be aggressive in stabilizing the medical problems, developing these children's physical abilities, and uplifting their self respect so they will strive to be independent and fulfilled (Salter 117).

My day-to-day relationship with Hope is the same as with the rest of my family. Yet it takes patience and understanding from each member of the family, including Hope, to minimize her limitations and encourage normal thoughts, actions, responsibilities, and goal setting.

A poet reminds me of Hope and of everyone else striving to be of some worth to this world.

I am a child,
All the world waits for my coming
All the earth watches with interest
To see what I shall become.
The future hangs in the balance,
For what I am
The world of tomorrow will be.

I am a child,
I have come into your world
About which I know nothing.
Why I came I know not.
How I came I know not.
I am curious.
I am interested.

I am a child,
You hold in your hand my destiny.
Whether I shall succeed or fail.
Give me, I pray you,
Those things that make for happiness.
Train me, I beg you,
That I may be a blessing to the world.
Author Unknown

When viewed in a broader prospective, I wonder who has helped whom more. Heaven sent, she has helped our family to grow in ways that would not have been possible without her spirit, determination, and desire. I cannot help but think, if she is willing and able to cope with her life's ups and downs, do we dare not try to keep our attitudes as one of "we can overcome."

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Josh Wright - Illustrator

LITTLE DANCER

EVA E. ALLEN

Black hair flying in the wind
Dancing to music heard from within
An imaginary audience fills imaginary chairs
Childhood laughter fills the air
And the world becomes her stage
As on and on the music plays.

Sunbeams join the chorus line
Dreams of fame fill her mind.
A magical aura around her swirls
On her tiptoes, she twirls and twirls.

When the music finally ends
She bows to her audience seen from within
Happily she leaves her friends
Knowing on another beautiful day
She will see them again
When she comes outside to play.

MCCCWA
HONORABLE MENTION

Whitney Brewer - Illustrator

Quiet People

Shelly Herrington

Quiet People aren't really quiet
Violent volcanoes of emotion
Erupt inside their tranquil selves
The lava flows to their extraneous limits
But never to their exterior

Quiet People aren't really shy
Just choosy when it comes to friends
For very few should ever know
The secrets of Quiet People

Quiet People aren't ignorant
They are not unaware of what's going on
They know more than you think
For they're listening to you every word
And studying your every movement

Quiet People are quite extraordinary
They are far superior at communication
They converse in their language of silence
With mouths closed and no sound uttered
One glance can give novels of information

Quiet People are the innocent ones
(But not really)
They cover their infamous deeds with secrecy
For concealment is the best alibi
And Quiet People never tell

Quiet People are the most dangerous kind
For while you sit there chatting idly
And while they're seated smiling sweetly
Diabolical plans are being made against you

Quiet People live quiet lives

(But not really)

MCCCWA Honorable Mention

NOTES